

# Mysterious Island

By *Arsenio Espiritu*

ONE day, when I was still a small child, a very strange and mysterious thing happened to me, which I shall never forget. I always treasured the memory of it as a kind of secret. I have always shrunk with horror from communicating it to my rational fellowmen because of the ridicule which I might be subjected to, and because clever-minded men might laugh at the simplicity of my tale. But I can hold no longer my peace. Something besides myself, as it were, impels me to disclose what I have long kept as a secret. As I take up my pen and write this narrative, it seems to me as if somebody were suggesting the strange thoughts which arise in me, clothed, however, with my infirm attempt of expressing as well as I can the singular story which I am about to relate. I would ask those who are inclined to subject the truth of everything to the unsparing scrutiny of reason, those who would question even the right use of their reason, to deal with all possible leniency with me. On the other hand, I would ask also those who would believe everything, those who would believe even the absurdity of that theory which holds that our ancestors were all monkeys, not to take everything as true, which he finds in this story.

One bright morning, as I was digging a hole along the seashore, my hand struck something hard and shining like gold. With considerable difficulty, I drew it out of the hole, and to my great delight and surprise, I found that it was a small golden book. On its covers were written strange characters perfectly unintelligible to me. I was a very curious child, as all children are, and I wanted to know what it had to say. The more I examined it, the more my curiosity grew. I said to myself, "If I could only read and understand it, how glad I would be." Scarcely had I expressed this wish, when a wonderful change came over me. My understanding, all of a sudden, was enlightened and the charac-

ters, which, a moment ago, were perfectly strange to me, I read and understood with singular clearness. And what was more wonderful still was, that as soon as I had read a word or gone over a page, these disappeared at once, as if someone were erasing the letters and tearing the pages. Thus word after word disappeared, and page after page vanished, and when I came to the last page, the golden book disappeared altogether. This did not attract much my attention for more wonderful things were recorded in the book. I know not to this day, whether this incident was a hallucination, or a delusion, or an illusion. So I would ask those who are learned in the science of mental analysis, to determine the reality of this strange happening which quite puzzles my limited understanding.

The title of the book was, "The Mysterious Island." It was written by the Black Bat and the Wise Owl, two wise birds who lived ages and ages ago. The book contains an account of the Mysterious Island, and of the wonderful adventures through which they passed.

## I

A long time ago, (the story ran thus), we lived in a vast forest. One day, in our wanderings, we chanced to fly over the Island of the Rising Sun, which was inhabited by a prosperous people. We were so struck by the magnificence of the country that we made up our minds to live and die there. Through its glittering domes, through its glittering spires, through its magnificent temples we made our daily flight. Over the shining house-tops we flew, over the crowded plazas we hovered—how happy we were!

Little did we think that this happiness was soon to come to an end; little did we think of the misfortune which was impending over the gay inhabitants and over ourselves! We were scarcely several months in the island, when, a

dreadful pestilence broke out. This horrible scourge visited nearly one-half of the population. For several weeks it raged with unabated fury until it had carried away all its victims. Through the half-empty streets, once alive with its gay pedestrians, now the daily scene of mournful processions; through the pestilential air, once invigorating and health-giving; through the theaters once filled to overflowing, now empty; through the temples once frequented solely by old women, now visited even by the most indifferent hearts we flew. What a transition from gaiety to sadness!

One day, a company of street boys found us flying about as usual. We noticed that our looks did not please them at all, and we heard one of them say, "Since these hideous birds appeared, evil things befell us." And all the rest sung in a chorus, "When hideous things appear, evil things naturally happen." Thus they shouted through the streets. The whole population was aroused, and as if inspired by no common devil, caught up the cry, and before night we were stoned out of the island. It is really strange how men grow superstitious when calamities befall them, and in their frenzy and blindness wreak their vengeance on those who are innocent.

In the cold night air we flew, over the boundless ocean we sailed, until the Island of the Rising Sun faded from our view. On, on, we flew, but we sighted no land. Towards morning when dawn was already visible in the East, Brother Bat said, "I can fly no longer; my wings are weary; and I fear that I must die." "Courage, dear brother," I answered, "Summon all thy strength. Fly yet a little longer and soon you will see the providence of God. Know you not that Heaven is able to bring forth our greatest happiness even out of our heaviest misfortunes?"

Before us was the rising sun; behind us, was the moon, hardly discernible in the distant western horizon. The sun's fiery disk had scarcely risen above the crimson waters, when far in the west, we heard a sweet voice say, "O faithful ocean, thou that obeyest my mandates, yield up the treasures which I have long hidden in thy bosom." The waters trembled,

and a whole island clothed in the loveliest garments of nature rose gradually beneath us. We gave thanks to the Lord for this singular manifestation of His power and goodness, and under the shadows of the morning we rested. Thus did the mysterious island make its mysterious appearance in the world.

It was an island fair and lovely to look at. Nature, as it were, had bestowed all her charms on this particular spot. There, you could stare at the sun at mid-day without being blinded by its strong rays; there, the cool and refreshing air of the morning pervaded the atmosphere throughout the whole day; there, the stars twinkled brighter than in any other part of the world; there, the thunder was never heard; and there, the storm never raged. In short, our island was another garden of Eden.

*(Here the narrative shifts to another place, and relates how an unfortunate pair was driven by the malice of men from their native land, and how Providence brought them to the mysterious island.)*

## II

Far, far away, in the land of the Setting Sun, lived Benjamin and his wife, Aurora, a God-fearing and a God-loving pair. Now, the people in that island were agriculturists. The country was so fertile that, with a little tilling of the soil, abundant crops were harvested. The land flowed with abundance, and there nobody was ever known to complain of hunger and thirst. It was always so, in that country from time immemorial. But a time came when this abundance came to an end. The harvests failed, and in a short time it was feared that a famine would break out. Strange to say, the crops of Benjamin and Aurora were as good as ever. At the time of the calamity, their crops yielded thrice as much produce as they were wont to gather. Their neighbors wondered. And they said to one another, "Why was this man spared and not we? What have we done to merit such misfortune? Are we not, each and everyone of us, as good as they?" Thus they reasoned. The envy of their neighbors increased from day to day, and soon Benjamin and Aurora were hated.

Meanwhile, the innocent pair, when they saw the trials which the good God was pleased to send them, never tired of helping their fellow creatures, as much as they could. They did not feel proud of their exemption from these calamities, if calamities they could be rightly called; they did not consider themselves invincible to misfortunes, nor did they think themselves fortunate. They were still the same Benjamin and Aurora. Prosperity in the midst of adversity disturbed not the humility of their hearts.

The next year, a similar thing occurred. The harvest was worse than ever, but Benjamin's crop this time increased ten-fold. This heightened the rising anger and envy of their fellowmen, and in spite of all their sacrifices, in spite of everything they did to alleviate the wants of their suffering countrymen, they were regarded with hatred by everybody. It did not take them long to notice this rank ingratitude. Instead of receiving kind words for the services which they had so willingly rendered, they received in return, insults.

A rumor soon spread that they were sorcerers. The failure of the crops were ascribed to infernal powers which they were supposed to have and the proof of it was, that while everybody else suffered, they alone prospered. Who, but they could have caused their crops to wither? A good God could not have allowed so much suffering among His creatures. Under the cover of hypocritical kindness, they strove to hide the inhumanity of their hearts. Thus the rumor ran.

So, one night, when they were asleep, they were awakened by the loud shouts of their neighbors. "Kill the sorcerers, kill the sorcerers, who bring these calamities upon us. Let us have our vengeance. The sooner we get rid of them, the better, for who knows what they might do next. Let us burn them alive." All these things the man and his wife heard with trembling hearts.

But one wiser than the rest said, "Let us put them on a boat, and let them drift to the ends of the earth, (people in those days thought the earth was flat), where monsters which infest the deeps will swallow them up."

And all shouted, "Let us do it now."

Immediately they seized the trembling creatures, and placed them in a boat. A strong current caught their bark and far into the ocean they were borne. Great was their terror when they found themselves in the wide ocean. They expected, momentarily, monsters of all shapes to rise from the treacherous deeps and swallow them up. A profound sleep, the sleep of the innocent, came over them. On the morning of the third day they awoke, and to their great astonishment, they found themselves on the shores of the mysterious island.

Behind them was the rising sun, before them was the mysterious island. Over the mountain tops was the round moon. Again we heard the same sweet voice from the west say, "O my chosen ones, inhabit the land which I have long prepared for you and your descendants. The peace of the Lord shall always be with you, and the hand of adversity shall never strike you."

On their bended knees they gave thanks to Almighty God for the singular favor which they had received. They were exceedingly delighted to see the mysterious island and all its wonders.

In this island, they lived to an advanced age. Their descendants multiplied exceedingly and at the end of the century the island was fairly inhabited.

*(Here the story describes the prosperity of the inhabitants. It relates also that, there nobody ever had a bad day, and that in the island, if the account of the authors be true, complete happiness always reigned.)*

### III

The third part of the story begins thus: "Reader, whoever thou art, if thou wouldst be worthy of the secrets which fortune hath placed before thee, purify thy mind from every trace of incredulity; make a solemn act of faith before reading any further; and entertain not the least shadow of doubt concerning the truth of our infallible testimony, for to doubt it would bring down the severest judgments of heaven on thy head."

(Without hesitation, I made up my mind to swallow up everything the authors of the book had to say, and with this disposition of mind caught up the thread of the story.)

"For a hundred years we lived in the mysterious island, and during all that time we saw mysterious things happening everyday. Once, we thought of leaving the precincts of the island,—a foolish thought it was—but we could not leave it for it seemed as if we were held by some strange power. Every day the island seemed to grow lovelier in our sight, and each succeeding day we felt that we were growing younger but stronger—a thing which we could, in no wise, account for.

At this time there was a lovely young man who lived near the seashore. He was so charming that the birds of the island gathered around him in flocks, and sang their loveliest songs; he was so kind he never knew fear. His parents and all who knew him loved him. We loved him, too.

One night when the inhabitants of the island were asleep, (all of them fell asleep early that night—an unusual thing), when in the solemn stillness of the night, only the rippling of the tiny waves and the sighing of the wind could be heard, young Benjamin, for it was the boy's name, awoke from his sleep. He rose, led by an unknown power, went to the seashore, and there sat on a stone. There, he sat looking at the placid ocean before him. There, he saw the moon peeping above the watery horizon. He gazed on the rippling waves, he gazed on the moonlit waters, he gazed at the beautiful moon, and then muttered to himself, "This world is a lovely world. What a happy place for man to live in!"

But he heard the wind sighing, and wondered why. So he asked playfully, "Wind, wind, why do you sigh?" The wind answered him not, but kept on sighing.

As he received no answer, he looked at the moon. He seemed to see the Man in the Moon looking very sad. So, he asked again playfully, "Man in the Moon, Man in the Moon, why do you look so sad?"

After he had said these words, a profound stillness came over the island. The waves

stopped rippling, and the winds stopped sighing. Now, a profound stillness comes over nature before a storm, but dear reader, we can assure you that it was no storm that came over the island.

Again, he repeated, "Man in the Moon, Man in the Moon, why do you look so sad?" Scarcely had he uttered these words, when we saw the moon coming nearer and nearer over the moonlit waters, until it rested just in front of Benjamin.

(Here, the authors describe the appearance of the moon as they saw it, and other astronomical observations important only to the students of astronomy. They give also a detailed description of the person of the Man in the Moon, most interesting to students of fine arts.)

We never saw such a lovely face, yet one could see that the expression on it was full of sadness, the story continues. His whole person shone with the softest light. He stretched his right hand to Benjamin. This, the boy caught up, and in another instant he was with the Man in the Moon. As for ourselves, we flew to one of the rocks on the moon's surface, where we witnessed everything that passed between them. In another moment, the moon had resumed its former place.

"My child," began the Man in the Moon, "I have something to tell you. Listen attentively to all that I have to say, and engrave my words in your heart."

"Know, that I am one of those Beings destined to watch over the affairs of the universe. When the universe was created, the Creator, in His goodness, appointed me to watch over the world of men, until the end of time comes. That was ages and ages ago. Each day the world passes before me in review, (the world revolves around its axis once in twenty-four hours), and once a month I go around it, to see how everything goes on with the world. When I say to the tide, "Rise," it rises, and when I say to it, "Fall" it falls. Great is my influence over the world, but man alone, the lord of the earth, insignificant as he is, stands aloft and refuses to concur with the harmony that exists in the universe. Man is a rebellious

creature. It has been so from the beginning. At the end of each year, I render an account of my trust to the King of the universe. This, He receives with great sorrow, and yet He still commands me, "Watch on, watch on." Faithfully have I fulfilled my duty, but how it pains me to see the ingratitude of men. From the wickedness of man I gather no consolation. How galling is that indifference, that utter disregard which man pays in return for the innumerable blessings which the Creator showers on him every day of his life!

"My child, look through this crystal." The man in the Moon handed him a crystal, and Benjamin looked as he was directed. First, he saw the Mysterious Island. This gradually disappeared, and other lands appeared through the magic crystal. Full twenty-four hours he looked through the magic crystal, which revealed to him every corner of the earth and the doings of men. When Benjamin laid down the crystal, his eyes were filled with tears. "I did not know," said he, "that there is so much misery in the world, that men could be so cruel and so heartless; that bad men prosper; and that the good are persecuted by their fellow-men. Truly, 'The enemy of man is man!'"

"My child," answered the Man in the Moon, "that is how the world goes on. By my word I caused the mysterious island to spring from the bowels of the ocean. That island, I prepared for my descent, and for that reason I beautified it. I selected the descendants of your great grandfather Benjamin and your great grandmother Aurora to inhabit it, for I am loath to go near wicked men. I selected you in particular to deliver my message to the world.

"I repeat, I have a message to give to the world, and you have a mission to fulfill. It is this. Understand, that dearer to me than everything else in the world are children. I would willingly do anything that would add to their happiness. As soon as you return, start on a journey. You are to visit the children of every country and clime. You are to tell them that I love them so much. You are to take that crystal with you, and whenever there is a full moon, you are to make them look through it. Thus, children will come to

know me. Thus, they will often think of me and love me. You will admonish them, for my sake to walk always in the path of goodness. How consoling, in the midst of my sorrows, would this be, indeed, to me. I promise you a long life, for a long time it will take you to fulfill your task. I will give you the power of doing every possible good, and when you have fulfilled your task, you can return to the mysterious island once more. "Farewell." In an instant the moon sped back to the Mysterious Island. Benjamin came down to the earth once more. We left the rock where we had remained concealed all the time. Scarcely had we done so, when the moon sped back faster than lightning to its former place. Thus ended the visit of the Man in the Moon in which wonderful things were revealed.

*(Ancient Egyptians, ancient Babylonians, ancient Chaldeans, ancient Greeks, where are your astronomers? . . . You that watched day and night the operations of the celestial worlds, why have you failed to inform us of this singular and wonderful phenomenon? Why have you failed to corroborate the unerring testimony of the Black Bat and the Wise Owl, for it is certain that a long time ago, in that particular year, in that particular month, in that particular week, on two consecutive nights, the moon either conjured up by an unknown magician, or attracted by an unknown force, or directed by the Man in the Moon, twice came speeding over the vast space which separates it from this earth of ours; that it actually rested over the mysterious island and twice resumed its former place as fast as it came! Saw you not this? Knew you not this?)*

#### IV .

After the mysterious events, which we have described, Benjamin still sat on the stone regarding the moon. Then, far away in the distant horizon, we spied a boat, speeding like an arrow, heading for our island. On it came and stopped right at Benjamin's feet. It was the same boat which brought Benjamin and Aurora, three centuries ago, to the shores of the mysterious island. Immediately he boarded it. Away it sped until the distant horizon swallowed it up.

Weeks passed, months passed, years passed, still nobody missed him. His parents, his relations, the inhabitants of the island, behaved as if they never had him, as if they never knew him. They lost him, yet they knew it not. How strange!

Full two hundred years Benjamin was away, and during all that time, wonderful things were happening in the island. Little by little, the population dwindled, until at last, not a single man was left. How this came to pass, we know not. When anybody died, they buried him without tears, without lamentations. Death they regarded as the stepping stone to eternal happiness. Nothing marred the perfect happiness in the island. And when only one man was left, he lived and died as if he had never known the society of men. Thus passed away the inhabitants of the mysterious island. Thus passed away the happiest race of mortals. Thus passed away men who were born happy, who lived happy, and who died happy.

But the island was still lovely even without its inhabitants. One night, as we were watching the beautiful tints of the gleaming waves, we spied something in the distance speeding toward our island. Our hearts beat faster. Was it Benjamin? Yes, it was he. At last the boat reached the shore. Benjamin stepped forth from it. He was lovelier than ever, he was younger than ever, he was still the young man who left years ago. Time which spares no man had spared him. How unexpressibly sweet, yet how sad was the expression of his face. Tears of joy, tears of sorrow, mingled with wonder and reverence, we shed. We rejoiced to see him once more, yet we sorrowed, because he looked so sad.

Once more, as he sat on that stone, he saw the full moon above the waters of his native sea. Once more he fixed his look on it, and in a voice so sweet, yet so sad, he spoke thus, "Man in the Moon, hear me once more. All the children in the world, I have visited and rejoiced. Not only did I do that, but I did more. The miserable, I relieved of their misery; the suffering hearts, I comforted; the good, I encouraged in the path of virtue; and

the bad I persuaded to lead good lives."

Then we heard a voice, (it was the same voice we heard two centuries ago), answer, "My child, you have faithfully obeyed my commands and I am mightily pleased with you. Come, rest forever in the kingdom of the Blessed."

Presently, we heard the sound of heavenly music, and the air around us was filled with fragrance, undefinable; Benjamin was rapt in ecstasy, and slowly he rose from the ground, as if borne by unseen hands. Higher and higher he rose, until he was enveloped by the majestic clouds, further and further the music was heard, until dead silence swallowed the sound of sweet voices altogether. Until morning we spent musing over the strange events of that night.

The next morning, the sun rose as usual with unclouded splendor. The island without Benjamin was lovely still. But at noon, we noticed that the birds were leaving the island in great numbers. Towards the close of the day, not a single bird was to be found in the island except ourselves. We wondered why!

That night there came a great change over the island. The night was hot—a thing which never was before—and the silence was so deep and so impressive, that we thought we were already in the kingdom of the dead. This was broken, ever and anon, by sounds so fearful that, no living ear could withstand them. These sounds were followed by the howling of dogs in agonies of fear. Sometimes we heard rumbling sounds which shook the island. Thus the night passed. We can never fully describe the terror which we endured that terrible night.

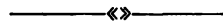
Towards dawn, a strong gale rose from the west, and, in a short time, the clouds over the island were so thick that morning was changed into night. Then, for the first time, the lightning flared, and the crash of thunder was heard. A terrible earthquake soon followed. The mountains were rent asunder and clapped again with a fearful thundering crash. Then fire came out of the bowels of the earth consuming every living thing below, and melting even the hardest rocks. All these happenings we beheld with trembling hearts. Then,

when all these catastrophes were at their worst, we beheld the island sinking slowly beneath us. And when the waters closed above the highest mountain peak, all of a sudden, the sky became clear, the sea became calm, and we saw the glorious sun rising in the eastern horizon. The mysterious island disappeared forever.

High up in the air we flew, rejoicing; above the clouds we sailed exulting; higher and higher still we flew. The spinning earth we left behind us. Into regions of sunshine perpetual we will fly, the celestial worlds we will visit, but never more shall the earth attract us; never more shall the fury of men persecute us. Never more, never more, shall we return. This book we leave for your perusal. Adieu! dear reader.

(*And the last page of the golden book vanished from my hands. I looked at the blue sea before me, and seemed to see the mysterious island. . . I looked up at the blue sky, and seemed to see the Wise Owl and the Black Bat taking their leave of this earth and saying to me, "Never more shall we return, never more shall we return. Farewell, dear reader."*)

O, you that would visit the moon in a cigar balloon, if you ever get there, expect not in the height of presumption to see the Man in the Moon, for great indeed will be your disappointment. He is not to be seen by profane eyes. He is only visible to a certain class of people. Only children see him with their innocent eyes, see him with their innocent imaginations, think of him with their innocent minds, and love him with their innocent hearts. How often in my young years have I thought of him, too.



## Decision

By Angel A. Roman, Jr.

**D**ECISION is that "phase of mental activity in which a volitional tendency reaches its completion." The whole trend of the present remarks, however, will deal with decision as being the conclusion or resolution arrived at by an individual after deep thinking, that is, after weighing every fact that mitigates or aggravates each and every circumstance regarding a certain matter.

Decision may prove beneficial and sometimes fatal to an individual, to associations and to nations. Quick decision and immediate action have carried many a man over critical plights where a little hesitation or deliberation would have spelled ruin. Napoleon's audacity and power of quick decision won for him victories and conquests. Alexander succeeded in conquering the world by virtue of his stern will and decision. Thus when are confronted by a crisis or dilemma, have pored on it, and finally have arrived at a decision, then the rest must be governed by that decision. We cannot go back on it. To hesitate or falter and not to

have the will to carry out our schemes, would be only to lose one's golden opportunity in life.

Each and every individual cherishes different ambitions and dreams during his youth. Each and every one of them longs to realize and attain his coveted goal. But in most instances, their efforts are in vain. Because, although they have bright prospects and are fitted to accomplish great achievements, their failure to decide which course to follow when they were young, and remaining stagnant, so to say, have made them what they ought not to be—mere "nobodies". Thus through lack of proper decision, their hope faded into the hazy distance, and with it their golden chance of success.

Quick decision and prompt action are requisite factors for the person who is to be a success in life. Our ideals and projects can materialize only—when we have come to a conclusion or resolution to put them into execution at the earliest time possible. Many a promising scheme has turned into a discouraging fail-