Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Helping you choose books for children

0-5 5-7 7-9 9-12 12+

Opening extract from **The Swiss Family Robinson**

Written by

Johann Wyss

with an introduction by Jon Scieszka

Published by

Penguin

Please print off and read at your leisure.

JOHANN WYSS

The Swiss Family Robinson



INTRODUCED BY
JON SCIESZKA

Translated by WILLIAM H. G. KINGSTON



PUFFIN

PUFFIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia
(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India
Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

puffinbooks.com

First published in Switzerland as *Der Schweizerische Robinson, Oder der Schriffbruchige Schweizerprediger und Seine Familie* 1812
First published in Great Britain 1814
Published in Puffin Books 1986
Reissued in this edition 2009

Introduction copyright © John Scieszka, 2009
Endnotes copyright © Penguin Books, 2009
All rights reserved

Set in 11.5/15pt Minion by Palimpsest Book Production Limited, Grangemouth, Stirlingshire
Printed in the UK by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–0–141–32530–9

www.greenpenguin.co.uk

Penguin Books is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. The book in your hands is made from paper certified by the Forest Stewardship Council.

1

For many days we had been tempest-tossed. Six times had the darkness closed over a wild and terrific scene, and returning light as often brought but renewed distress, for the raging storm increased in fury until on the seventh day all hope was lost.

We were driven completely out of our course; no conjecture could be formed as to our whereabouts. The crew had lost heart, and were utterly exhausted by incessant labour.

The riven masts had gone by the board, leaks had been sprung in every direction, and the water, which rushed in, gained upon us rapidly.

Instead of reckless oaths, the seamen now uttered frantic cries to God for mercy, mingled with strange and often ludicrous vows, to be performed should deliverance be granted.

Every man on board alternately commended his soul to his Creator, and strove to bethink himself of some means of saving his life.

My heart sank as I looked round upon my family in the midst of these horrors. Our four young sons were overpowered by terror. 'Dear children,' said I, 'if the Lord will, He can save us even from this fearful peril; if not, let us calmly yield our lives into His hand, and think of the joy and blessedness of finding ourselves for ever and ever united in that happy home above.'

At these words my weeping wife looked bravely up, and, as the boys clustered round her, she began to cheer and encourage them with calm and loving words. I rejoiced to see her fortitude, though my heart was ready to break as I gazed on my dear ones.

We knelt down together, one after another praying with deep earnestness and emotion. Fritz, in particular, besought help and deliverance for his dear parents and brothers, as though quite forgetting himself.

Our hearts were soothed by the never-failing comfort of child-like confiding prayer, and the horrors of our situation seemed less overwhelming. 'Ah,' thought I, 'the Lord will hear our prayer! He will help us.'

Amid the roar of the thundering waves I suddenly heard the cry of 'Land! land!', while at the same instant the ship struck with a frightful shock, which threw everyone to the deck, and seemed to threaten her immediate destruction.

Dreadful sounds betokened the breaking up of the ship, and the roaring waters poured in on all sides.

Then the voice of the captain was heard above the

tumult, shouting, 'Lower away the boats! We are lost!'

'Lost!' I exclaimed, and the word went like a dagger to my heart; but seeing my children's terror renewed, I composed myself, calling out cheerfully, 'Take courage, my boys! We are all above water yet. There is the land not far off, let us do our best to reach it. You know God helps those that help themselves!' With that, I left them and went on deck. What was my horror when through the foam and spray I beheld the only remaining boat leave the ship, the last of the seamen spring into her and push off, regardless of my cries and entreaties that we might be allowed to share their slender chance of preserving their lives. My voice was drowned in the howling of the blast, and even had the crew wished it, the return of the boat was impossible.

Casting my eyes despairingly around, I became gradually aware that our position was by no means hopeless, inasmuch as the stern of the ship containing our cabin was jammed between two high rocks, and was partly raised from among the breakers which dashed the forepart to pieces. As the clouds of mist and rain drove past, I could make out, through rents in the vaporous curtain, a line of rocky coast, and, rugged as it was, my heart bounded towards it as a sign of help in the hour of need. Yet the sense of our lonely and forsaken condition weighed heavily upon me as I returned to my family, constraining myself to say with a smile, 'Courage, dear ones! Although

our good ship will never sail more, she is so placed that our cabin will remain above water, and tomorrow, if the wind and waves abate, I see no reason why we should not be able to get ashore.'

These few words had an immediate effect on the spirits of my children, who at once regarded our problematical chance of escaping as a happy certainty, and began to enjoy the relief from the violent pitching and rolling of the vessel.

My wife, however, perceived my distress and anxiety in spite of my forced composure, and I made her comprehend our real situation, greatly fearing the effect of the intelligence on her nerves. Not for a moment did her courage and trust in Providence forsake her, and on seeing this, my fortitude revived.

'We must find some food, and take a good supper,' said she, 'it will never do to grow faint by fasting too long. We shall require our utmost strength tomorrow.'

Night drew on apace, the storm was as fierce as ever, and at intervals we were startled by crashes announcing further damage to our unfortunate ship.

'God will help us soon now, won't He, father?' said my youngest child.

'You silly little thing,' said Fritz, my eldest son, sharply, 'don't you know that we must not settle what God is to do for us? We must have patience and wait His time.'

'Very well said, had it been said kindly, Fritz, my boy.

You too often speak harshly to your brothers, although you may not mean to do so.'

A good meal being now ready, my youngsters ate heartily, and retiring to rest were speedily fast asleep. Fritz, who was of an age to be aware of the real danger we were in, kept watch with us. After a long silence, 'Father,' said he, 'don't you think we might contrive swimming-belts for mother and the boys? With those we might all escape to land, for you and I can swim.'

'Your idea is so good,' answered I, 'that I shall arrange something at once, in case of an accident during the night.'

We immediately searched about for what would answer the purpose, and fortunately got hold of a number of empty flasks and tin canisters, which we connected two and two together so as to form floats sufficiently buoyant to support a person in the water, and my wife and young sons each willingly put one on. I then provided myself with matches, knives, cord, and other portable articles, trusting that, should the vessel go to pieces before daylight, we might gain the shore, not wholly destitute.

Fritz, as well as his brothers, now slept soundly. Throughout the night my wife and I maintained our prayerful watch, dreading at every fresh sound some fatal change in the position of the wreck.

At length the faint dawn of day appeared, the long weary night was over, and with thankful hearts we

perceived that the gale had begun to moderate; blue sky was seen above us, and the lovely hues of sunrise adorned the eastern horizon.

I aroused the boys, and we assembled on the remaining portion of the deck, when they, to their surprise, discovered that no one else was on board.

'Hallo, papa! What has become of everybody? Are the sailors gone? Have they taken away the boats? Oh, papa! why did they leave us behind? What can we do by ourselves!'

'My good children,' I replied, 'we must not despair, although we seem deserted. See how those on whose skill and good faith we depended have left us cruelly to our fate in the hour of danger. God will never do so. He has not forsaken us, and we will trust Him still. Only let us bestir ourselves, and each cheerily do his best. Who has anything to propose?'

'The sea will soon be calm enough for swimming,' said Fritz.

'And that would be all very fine for you,' exclaimed Ernest, 'but think of mother and the rest of us! Why not build a raft and all get on shore together?'

'We should find it difficult, I think, to make a raft that would carry us safe to shore. However, we must contrive something, and first let each try to procure what will be of most use to us.'

Away we all went to see what was to be found, I myself

proceeding to examine, as of greatest consequence, the supplies of provisions and fresh water within our reach.

My wife took her youngest son, Franz, to help her to feed the unfortunate animals on board, who were in a pitiful plight, having been neglected for several days.

Fritz hastened to the arms chest, Ernest to look for tools; and Jack went towards the captain's cabin, the door of which he no sooner opened, than out sprang two splendid large dogs, who testified their extreme delight and gratitude by such tremendous bounds that they knocked their little deliverer completely head over heels, frightening him nearly out of his wits. Jack did not long yield either to fear or anger, he presently recovered himself, the dogs seemed to ask pardon by vehemently licking his face and hands, and so, seizing the larger by the ears, he jumped on his back, and, to my great amusement, coolly rode to meet me as I came up the hatchway.

When we reassembled in the cabin, we all displayed our treasures.

Fritz brought a couple of guns, shot belt, powder-flasks, and plenty of bullets.

Ernest produced a cap full of nails, an axe, and a hammer, while pincers, chisels and augers stuck out of all his pockets.

Little Franz carried a box, and eagerly began to show us the 'nice sharp little hooks' it contained. 'Well done, Franz!' cried I, 'these fish hooks, which you the youngest

have found, may contribute more than anything else in the ship to save our lives by procuring food for us. Fritz and Ernest, you have chosen well.'

'Will you praise me too?' said my dear wife. 'I have nothing to show, but I can give you good news. Some useful animals are still alive: a cow, a donkey, two goats, six sheep, a ram and a fine sow. I was but just in time to save their lives by taking food to them.'

'All these things are excellent indeed,' said I, 'but my friend Jack here has presented me with a couple of huge hungry useless dogs, who will eat more than any of us.'

'Oh, papa! They will be of use! Why, they will help us to hunt when we get on shore!'

'No doubt they will, if ever we do get on shore, Jack; but I must say I don't know how it is to be done.'

'Can't we each get into a big tub, and float there?' returned he. 'I have often sailed splendidly like that, round the pond at home.'

'My child, you have hit on a capital idea,' cried I. 'Now, Ernest, let me have your tools, hammers, nails, saws, augers, and all; and then make haste to collect any tubs you can find!'

We very soon found four large casks, made of sound wood, and strongly bound with iron hoops; they were floating with many other things in the water in the hold, but we managed to fish them out, and drag them to a suitable place for launching them. They were exactly what

I wanted, and I succeeded in sawing them across the middle. Hard work it was, and we were glad enough to stop and refresh ourselves with wine and biscuits.

My eight tubs now stood ranged in a row near the water's edge, and I looked at them with great satisfaction; to my surprise, my wife did not seem to share my pleasure!

'I shall never,' said she, 'muster courage to get into one of these!'

'Do not be too sure of that, dear wife, when you see my contrivance completed, you will perhaps prefer it to this immovable wreck.'

I next procured a long thin plank on which my tubs could be fixed, and the two ends of this I bent upwards so as to form a keel. Other two planks were nailed along the sides of the tubs; they also being flexible, were brought to a point at each end, and all firmly secured and nailed together. I felt satisfied that in smooth water this craft would be perfectly trustworthy. But when we thought all was ready for the launch, we found, to our dismay, that the grand contrivance was so heavy and clumsy, that even our united efforts could not move it an inch.

'I must have a lever,' cried I. 'Run and fetch the capstan bar!'

Fritz quickly brought one and, having formed rollers by cutting up a long spar, I raised the forepart of my boat with the bar, and my sons placed a roller under it.

'How is it, father,' inquired Ernest, 'that with that thing

you alone can do more than all of us together?'

I explained, as well as I could in a hurry, the principle of the lever; and promised to have a long talk on the subject of Mechanics, should we have a future opportunity.

I now made fast a long rope to the stern of our boat, attaching the other end to a beam; then placing a second and third roller under it, we once more began to push, this time with success, and soon our gallant craft was safely launched: so swiftly indeed did she glide into the water that, but for the rope, she would have passed beyond our reach. The boys wished to jump in directly; but, alas, she leaned so much on one side that they could not venture to do so.

Some heavy things being thrown in, however, the boat righted itself by degrees, and the boys were so delighted that they struggled which should first leap in to have the fun of sitting down in the tubs. But it was plain to me at once that something more was required to make her perfectly safe, so I contrived outriggers to preserve the balance, by nailing long poles across at the stem and stern, and fixing at the ends of each empty brandy casks. Then the boat appearing steady, I got in; and turning it towards the most open side of the wreck, I cut and cleared away obstructions, so as to leave a free passage for our departure, and the boys brought oars to be ready for the voyage. This important undertaking we were forced to postpone until the next day, as it was by this time far too late to attempt

it. It was not pleasant to have to spend another night in so precarious a situation; but, yielding to necessity, we sat down to enjoy a comfortable supper, for during our exciting and incessant work all day we had taken nothing but an occasional biscuit and a little wine.

We prepared for rest in a much happier frame of mind than on the preceding day, but I did not forget the possibility of a renewed storm, and therefore made every one put on the belts as before. Then retiring to our berths, peaceful sleep prepared us all for the exertions of the coming day.

We rose up betimes, for sleep weighs lightly on the hopeful, as well as on the anxious. After kneeling together in prayer, 'Now my beloved ones,' said I, 'with God's help we are about to effect our escape. Let the poor animals we must leave behind be well fed, and put plenty of fodder within their reach: in a few days we may be able to return, and save them likewise. After that, collect everything you can think of which may be of use to us.'

The boys joyfully obeyed me, and I selected from the large quantity of stores they got together, canvas to make a tent, a chest of carpenter's tools, guns, pistols, powder, shot, and bullets, rods and fishing tackle, an iron pot, a case of portable soup and another of biscuit. These useful articles of course took the place of the ballast I had hastily thrown in the day before.

With a hearty prayer for God's blessing, we now began to take our seats, each in his tub. Just then we heard the

cocks begin to crow, as though to reproach us for deserting them. 'Why should not the fowls go with us!' exclaimed I. 'If we find no food for *them*, they can be food for *us*!' Ten hens and a couple of cocks were accordingly placed in one of the tubs, and secured with some wire-netting over them.

The ducks and geese were set at liberty, and took to the water at once, while the pigeons, rejoicing to find themselves on the wing, swiftly made for the shore. My wife, who managed all this for me, kept us waiting for her some little time, and came at last with a bag as big as a pillow in her arms. 'This is *my* contribution,' said she, throwing the bag to little Franz, to be, as I thought, a cushion for him to sit upon.

All being ready, we cast off, and moved away from the wreck. My good, brave wife sat in the first compartment of the boat; next her was Franz, a pretty little boy, nearly eight years old. Then came Fritz, a handsome, spirited young fellow of fifteen; the two centre tubs contained the valuable cargo; then came our bold, thoughtless Jack; next him Ernest, my second son, intelligent, well-informed, and rather indolent. I myself, the anxious, loving father, stood in the stern, endeavouring to guide the raft with its precious burden to a safe landing-place.

The elder boys took the oars, everyone wore a float belt, and had something useful close to him in case of being thrown into the water.

The tide was flowing, which was a great help to the young oarsmen. We emerged from the wreck and glided into the open sea. All eyes were strained to get a full view of the land, and the boys pulled with a will; but for some time we made no progress, as the boat kept turning round and round, until I hit upon the right way to steer it, after which we merrily made for the shore.

We had left the two dogs, Turk and Juno, on the wreck, as being both large mastiffs we did not care to have their additional weight on board our craft; but when they saw us apparently deserting them, they set up a piteous howl, and sprang into the sea. I was sorry to see this, for the distance to the land was so great that I scarcely expected them to be able to accomplish it. They followed us, however, and, occasionally resting their fore-paws on the outriggers, kept up with us well. Jack was inclined to deny them this their only chance of safety. 'Stop,' said I, 'that would be unkind as well as foolish; remember, the merciful man regardeth the life of his beast.'

Our passage though tedious was safe; but the nearer we approached the shore the less inviting it appeared; the barren rocks seemed to threaten us with misery and want.

Many casks, boxes and bales of goods floated on the water around us. Fritz and I managed to secure a couple of hogsheads, so as to tow them alongside. With the prospect of famine before us, it was desirable to lay hold of anything likely to contain provisions.

By and by we began to perceive that, between and beyond the cliffs, green grass and trees were discernible. Fritz could distinguish many tall palms, and Ernest hoped they would prove to be coconut trees, and enjoyed the thoughts of drinking the refreshing milk.

'I am very sorry I never thought of bringing away the Captain's telescope,' said I.

'Oh, look here, father!' cried Jack, drawing a little spy-glass joyfully out of his pocket.

By means of this glass, I made out that at some distance to the left the coast was much more inviting; a strong current however carried us directly towards the frowning rocks, but I presently observed an opening, where a stream flowed into the sea, and saw that our geese and ducks were swimming towards this place. I steered after them into the creek, and we found ourselves in a small bay or inlet where the water was perfectly smooth and of moderate depth. The ground sloped gently upwards from the low banks to the cliffs which here retired inland, leaving a small plain, on which it was easy for us to land. Everyone sprang gladly out of the boat but little Franz, who, lying packed in his tub like a potted shrimp, had to be lifted out by his mother.

The dogs had scrambled on shore before us; they received us with loud barking and the wildest demonstrations of delight. The geese and ducks kept up an incessant din, added to which was the screaming and croaking of flamingoes

and penguins, whose dominion we were invading. The noise was deafening, but far from unwelcome to me, as I thought of the good dinners the birds might furnish.

As soon as we could gather our children around us on dry land, we knelt to offer thanks and praise for our merciful escape, and with full hearts we commended ourselves to God's good keeping for the time to come.

All hands then briskly fell to the work of unloading, and, oh, how rich we felt ourselves as we did so! The poultry we left at liberty to forage for themselves, and set about finding a suitable place to erect a tent in which to pass the night. This we speedily did; thrusting a long spar into a hole in the rock, and supporting the other end by a pole firmly planted in the ground, we formed a framework over which we stretched the sailcloth we had brought; besides fastening this down with pegs, we placed our heavy chests and boxes on the border of the canvas, and arranged hooks so as to be able to close up the entrance during the night.

When this was accomplished, the boys ran to collect moss and grass, to spread in the tent for our beds, while I arranged a fireplace with some large flat stones, near the brook which flowed close by. Dry twigs and seaweed were soon in a blaze on the hearth, I filled the iron pot with water, and giving my wife several cakes of the portable soup, she established herself as our cook, with little Franz to help her.

He, thinking his mother was melting some glue for carpentry, was eager to know 'what papa was going to make next?'

'This is to be soup for your dinner, my child. Do you think these cakes look like glue?'

'Yes, indeed I do!' replied Franz. 'And I should not much like to taste glue soup! Don't you want some beef or mutton, mamma?'

'Where can I get it, dear?' said she, 'we are a long way from a butcher's shop! But these cakes are made of the juice of good meat, boiled till it becomes a strong stiff jelly – people take them when they go to sea, because on a long voyage they can only have salt meat, which will not make nice soup.'

Fritz meanwhile leaving a loaded gun with me, took another himself, and went along the rough coast to see what lay beyond the stream; this fatiguing sort of walk not suiting Ernest's fancy, he sauntered down to the beach, and Jack scrambled among the rocks searching for shellfish.

I was anxious to land the two casks which were floating alongside our boat, but on attempting to do so, I found that I could not get them up the bank on which we had landed, and was therefore obliged to look for a more convenient spot. As I did so, I was startled by hearing Jack shouting for help, as though in great danger. He was at some distance, and I hurried towards him with a hatchet in my hand. The little fellow stood screaming in a deep

pool, and as I approached, I saw that a huge lobster had caught his leg in its powerful claw. Poor Jack was in a terrible fright; kick as he would, his enemy still clung on. I waded into the water, and seizing the lobster firmly by the back, managed to make it loosen its hold, and we brought it safe to land. Jack, having speedily recovered his spirits, and anxious to take such a prize to his mother, caught the lobster in both hands, but instantly received such a severe blow from its tail, that he flung it down, and passionately hit the creature with a large stone. This display of temper vexed me. 'You are acting in a very childish way, my son,' said I. 'Never strike an enemy in a revengeful spirit.' Once more lifting the lobster, Jack ran triumphantly towards the tent.

'Mother, mother! A lobster! A lobster, Ernest! Look here, Franz! Mind, he'll bite you! Where's Fritz?' All came crowding round Jack and his prize, wondering at its unusual size, and Ernest wanted his mother to make lobster soup directly, by adding it to what she was now boiling.

She, however, begged to decline making any such experiment, and said she preferred cooking one dish at a time. Having remarked that the scene of Jack's adventure afforded a convenient place for getting my casks on shore, I returned thither and succeeded in drawing them up on the beach, where I set them on end, and for the present left them.