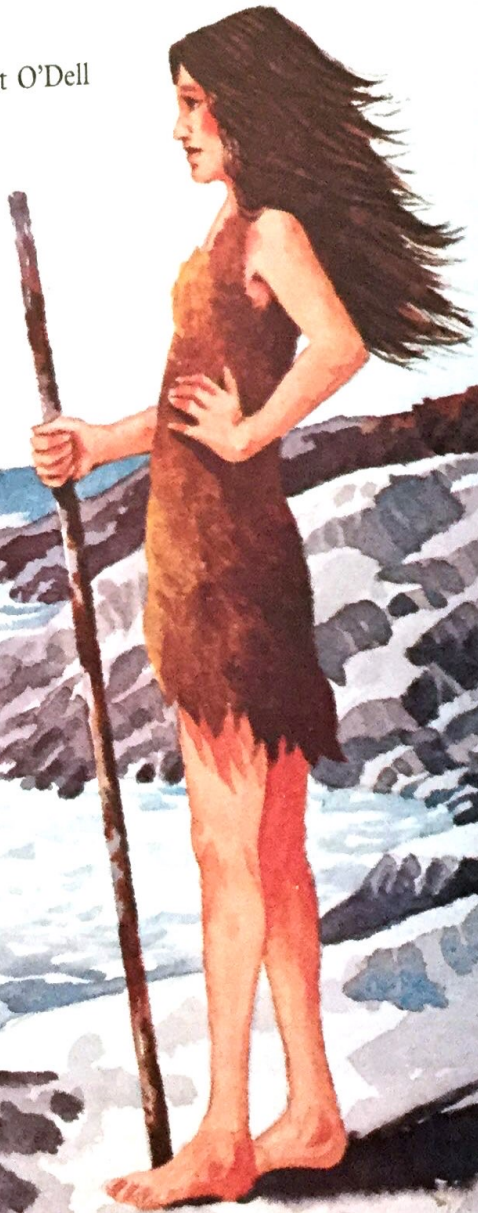


Dangerous Voyage

A chapter from the novel

Island of the Blue Dolphins by Scott O'Dell

Illustrated by Daniel San Souci



Off the coast of California there is an island shaped like a blue dolphin lying on its side, with its tail pointing toward sunrise. For centuries Indians had lived on the island. Then one day a party of sea-otter hunters landed there and tried to cheat the Indians. A bloody battle was fought. When the hunters left the island, only a few Indians remained alive.

The people of the island now shared one fear—that the hunters would return and kill them all. When sailors arrived and offered to carry them to safety, the Indians went aboard—all except six-year-old Ramo, who did not reach the ship in time, and twelve-year-old Karana,¹ who leaped from the ship and swam back to be with her brother. Two days later, Ramo was killed by wild dogs and Karana found herself alone.

As the seasons passed, Karana waited. She hoped for a ship to rescue her. To survive she made her own weapons, built a shelter, and defended herself against her enemies—the wild dogs. But Karana realized that for as long as she was trapped on the island, her worst enemy would be loneliness. In the story that follows, Karana tells her plan for escaping the lonely Island of the Blue Dolphins.

1. Karana (kuh-RAH-nuh).

Summer is the best time on the Island of the Blue Dolphins. The sun is warm then and the winds blow milder out of the west, sometimes out of the south.

It was during these days that the ship might return and now I spent most of my time on the rock, looking out from the high headland into the east, toward the country where my people had gone, across the sea that was never-ending.

Once while I watched I saw a small object which I took to be the ship, but a stream of water rose from it and I knew that it was a whale spouting. During those summer days I saw nothing else.

The first storm of winter ended my hopes. If the white men's ship were coming for me it would have come during the time of good weather. Now I would have to wait until winter was gone, maybe longer.

The thought of being alone on the island while so many suns rose from the sea and went slowly back into the sea filled my heart with loneliness. I had not felt so lonely before because I was sure that the ship would return as Chief Matasaip had said it would. Now my hopes were dead. Now I was really alone. I could not eat much, nor could I sleep without dreaming terrible dreams.

The storm blew out of the north, sending big waves against the island and winds so strong that I was unable to stay on the rock. I moved my bed to the foot of the rock and for protection kept a fire going throughout the night. I slept there five times. The first night the wild dogs came and stood outside the ring made by the fire. I killed three of them with arrows, but not the leader, and they did not come again.



On the sixth day, when the storm had ended, I went to the place where my people had hidden their canoes, filled with supplies, and let myself down over the cliff. This part of the shore was sheltered from the wind and I found the canoes just as they had been left. The dried food was still good, but the water was stale, so I went back to the spring and filled a fresh basket.

I had decided during the days of the storm, when I had given up hope of seeing the ship, that I would take one of the canoes and go to the country that

lay toward the east. I knew that my ancestors had crossed the sea in their canoes, coming from that place which lay beyond. I was not nearly so skilled with a canoe as these men, but I must say that whatever might befall me on the endless waters did not trouble me. It meant far less than the thought of staying on the island alone, without a home or companions, pursued by wild dogs, where everything reminded me of those who were dead and those who had gone away.

Of the four canoes stored there against the cliff, I chose the smallest, which was still very heavy because it could carry six people. The task that faced me was to push it down the rocky shore and into the water, a distance four or five times its length.

This I did by first removing all the large rocks in front of the canoe. I then filled in all these holes with pebbles and along this path laid down long strips of kelp, making a slippery bed. The shore was steep and, once I got the canoe to move with its own weight, it slid down the path and into the water.

The sun was in the west when I left the shore. The sea was calm behind the high cliffs. Using the two-bladed paddle I quickly skirted the south part of the island. As I reached the sandspit the wind struck. I was paddling from the back of the canoe because you can go faster kneeling there, but I could not handle it in the wind.



Kneeling in the middle of the canoe, I paddled hard and did not pause until I had gone through the tides that run fast around the sandspit. There were many small waves and I was soon wet, but as I came out from behind the spit the spray lessened and the waves grew long and rolling. Though it would have been easier to go the way they slanted, this would have taken me in the wrong direction. I therefore kept them on my left hand, as well as the island, which grew smaller and smaller, behind me.

At dusk I looked back. The Island of the Blue Dolphins had disappeared. This was the first time that I felt afraid.

There were only hills and valleys of water around me now. When I was in a valley I could see nothing and when the canoe rose out of it, only the ocean stretching away and away.

Night fell and I drank from the basket. The water cooled my throat.

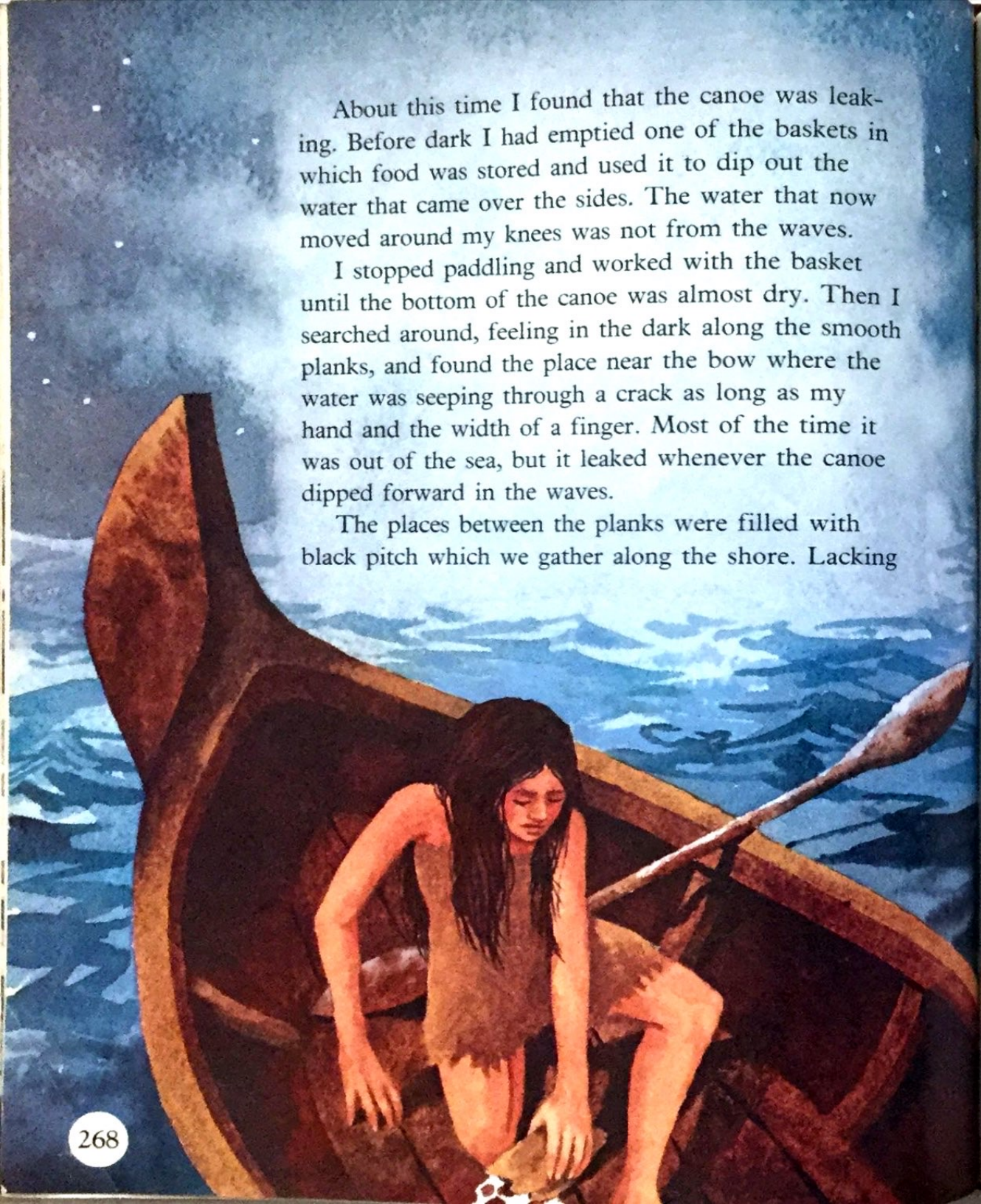
The sea was black and there was no difference between it and the sky. The waves made no sound among themselves, only faint noises as they went under the canoe or struck against it. Sometimes the noises seemed angry and at other times like people laughing. I was not hungry because of my fear.

The first star made me feel less afraid. It came out low in the sky and it was in front of me, toward the east. Other stars began to appear all around, but it was this one I kept my gaze upon. It was in the figure that we call a serpent, a star which shone green and which I knew. Now and then it was hidden by mist, yet it always came out brightly again.



Without this star I would have been lost, for the waves never changed. They came always from the same direction and in a manner that kept pushing me away from the place I wanted to reach. For this reason the canoe made a path in the black water like a snake. But somehow I kept moving toward the star which shone in the east.

This star rose high and then I kept the North Star on my left hand, the one we call "the star that does not move." The wind grew quiet. Since it always died down when the night was half over, I knew how long I had been traveling and how far away the dawn was.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a simple, light-colored, fringed garment, is kneeling in a wooden canoe. She is looking down at something in her hands. The canoe is on a dark blue sea with white-capped waves. The sky is dark blue with a few white stars. The canoe is made of dark wood and has a large, curved prow. A wooden paddle is resting in the canoe. The overall scene is at night.

About this time I found that the canoe was leaking. Before dark I had emptied one of the baskets in which food was stored and used it to dip out the water that came over the sides. The water that now moved around my knees was not from the waves.

I stopped paddling and worked with the basket until the bottom of the canoe was almost dry. Then I searched around, feeling in the dark along the smooth planks, and found the place near the bow where the water was seeping through a crack as long as my hand and the width of a finger. Most of the time it was out of the sea, but it leaked whenever the canoe dipped forward in the waves.

The places between the planks were filled with black pitch which we gather along the shore. Lacking

this, I tore a piece of fiber from my skirt and pressed it into the crack, which held back the water.

Dawn broke in a clear sky and as the sun came out of the waves I saw that it was far off on my left. During the night I had drifted south of the place I wished to go, so I changed my direction and paddled along the path made by the rising sun.

There was no wind on this morning and the long waves went quietly under the canoe. I therefore moved faster than during the night.

I was very tired, but more hopeful than I had been since I left the island. If the good weather did not change, I would cover many leagues before dark. Another night and another day might bring me within sight of the shore toward which I was going.

Not long after dawn, while I was thinking of this strange place and what it would look like, the canoe began to leak again. This crack was between the same planks, but was a larger one and close to where I was kneeling.

The fiber I tore from my skirt and pushed into the crack held back most of the water which seeped in whenever the canoe rose and fell with the waves. Yet I could see that the planks were weak from one end to the other, probably from the canoe being stored so long in the sun, and that they might open along their whole length if the waves grew rougher.

It was suddenly clear to me that it was dangerous to go on. The voyage would take two more days, perhaps longer. By turning back to the island I would not have nearly so far to travel.

Still I could not make up my mind to do so. The sea was calm and I had come far. The thought of turning back after all this labor was more than I could bear. Even greater was the thought of the deserted island I would return to, of living there alone and forgotten. For how many suns and how many moons?

The canoe drifted idly on the calm sea while these thoughts went over and over in my mind, but when I saw the water seeping through the crack again, I picked up the paddle. There was no choice except to turn back toward the island.

I knew that only by the best of fortune would I ever reach it.

The wind did not blow until the sun was overhead. Before that time I covered a good distance, pausing only when it was necessary to dip water from the canoe. With the wind I went more slowly and had to stop more often because of the water spilling over the sides, but the leak did not grow worse.

This was my first good fortune. The next was when a swarm of dolphins appeared. They came swimming out of the west, but as they saw the canoe they turned around in a great circle and began to follow me. They swam up slowly and so close that I could see their eyes, which are large and the color of the ocean. Then they swam on ahead of the canoe, crossing back and forth in front of it, diving in and out, as if they were weaving a piece of cloth with their broad snouts.



Dolphins are animals of good omen. It made me happy to have them swimming around the canoe, and though my hands had begun to bleed from the chafing of the paddle, just watching them made me forget the pain. I was very lonely before they appeared, but now I felt that I had friends with me and did not feel the same.

The blue dolphins left me shortly before dusk. They left as quickly as they had come, going on into the west, but for a long time I could see the last of the sun shining on them. After night fell I could still see them in my thoughts, and it was because of this that I kept on paddling when I wanted to lie down and sleep.

More than anything, it was the blue dolphins that took me back home.

Fog came with the night, yet from time to time I could see the star that stands high in the west, the red star called Magat which is part of the figure that looks like a crawfish and is known by that name. The crack in the planks grew wider so I had to stop often to fill it with fiber and to dip out the water.

The night was very long, longer than the night before. Twice I dozed kneeling there in the canoe, though I was more afraid than I had ever been. But the morning broke clear and in front of me lay the dim line of the island like a great fish sunning itself on the sea.

I reached it before the sun was high, the sandspit and its tides that bore me into the shore. My legs were stiff from kneeling and as the canoe struck the sand I fell when I rose to climb out. I crawled through the shallow water and up the beach. There I lay for a long time, hugging the sand in happiness.



About SCOTT O'DELL

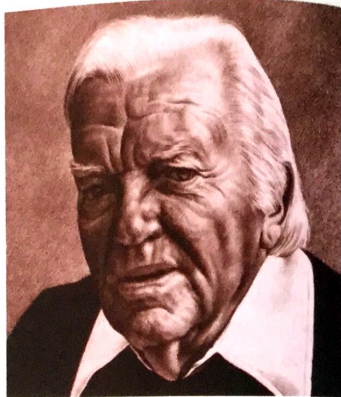
Scott O'Dell was born in Los Angeles when it still had the flavor of a frontier town. His father worked for the railroad, and his family moved a lot. One time they lived on an island in a house on stilts above the ocean. "That is why," he says, "the feel of the frontier and the sound of the sea are in my books."

Scott O'Dell spent his early career as a movie cameraman and as a book editor for a newspaper. Then he began writing adventure stories, first for adults and then for children. His books for children have won many prizes and awards. For each book, Scott O'Dell spends about three or four months doing research and six months writing.

According to Scott O'Dell, *Island of the Blue Dolphins* "is based upon the true story of a girl who was left upon an island near the coast of southern California and lived there for eighteen years, alone." But *Island of the Blue Dolphins* also reflects Scott O'Dell's memories of living on an island. On summer days, he and his friends found big logs and paddled out to sea. The logs were their "proud canoes," taking them wherever they wished to explore.

More Books by Scott O'Dell

Zia
The 290
Sing Down the Moon



Think about the story. Finish the time line on page 259. Fill in events that show what happened to Karana. Then answer the questions.

1. Why is Karana so concerned with what season of the year it is? What is the effect of the first storm of the winter upon her?
2. Use your time line. Why is Karana afraid of the wild dogs? Why might she also be angry at them?
3. Except for the dogs, Karana is safe on the Island of the Blue Dolphins. Why does Karana decide to risk crossing the sea to reach another island?
4. What are the obstacles to her reaching another island safely? Explain what dangers they represent.
5. This unit is about living with nature. How is nature both an enemy and a friend to Karana?
6. Do you think it was right for Karana to turn back to the Island of the Blue Dolphins? Why or why not?
7. How might Karana's experiences while trying to reach another island discourage her? How might her experiences encourage her?
8. What might happen to Karana after her return to the Island of the Blue Dolphins?

Think and Discuss