

1854, found many vessels on Lake Erie, but the fortunes of one alone have special interest for us. About this time the schooner *Conductor*, owned by John McLeod, of the Provincial Parliament, a resident of Amherstburg, at the mouth of the Detroit river, entered the lake from that river, bound for Port Dalhousie, at the mouth of the Welland canal. She was heavily loaded with grain. Her crew consisted of Captain Hackett, a Highlander by birth, and a skilful and experienced navigator, and six sailors. At nightfall, shortly after leaving the head of the lake, one of those terrific storms, with which the late autumnal navigators of that "Sea of the Woods" are all too familiar, overtook them. The weather was intensely cold for the season; the air was filled with snow and sleet; the chilled water made ice rapidly, encumbering the schooner, and loading down her decks and rigging. As the gale increased, the tops of the waves were shorn off by the fierce blasts, clouding the whole atmosphere with frozen spray, or what the sailors call "spoon-drift," rendering it impossible to see any object a few rods distant. Driving helplessly before the wind, yet in the direction of its place of destination, the schooner speed through the darkness. At last, near midnight, running closer than her crew supposed to the Canadian shore, she struck on the outer bar off Long Point Island, beat heavily across it, and sunk in the deeper water between it and the inner bar. The hull was entirely submerged, the waves rolling in heavily, and dashing over the rigging, to which the crew betook themselves. Lashed there, numbed with cold, drenched by the pitiless waves, and scourged by the showers of sleet driven before the wind, they waited for morning. The slow, dreadful hours wore away, and at length the dubious and doubtful gray of a morning of tempest succeeded to the utter darkness of night.

Abigail Becker chanced at that time to be in her hut with none but her young children. Her husband was absent on the shore, and she was left the sole adult occupant of the island, save the light-house keeper, at the lower end, some fifteen miles off. Looking out at day-light on the beach in front of her door, she saw the shattered boat of the *Conductor*, cast up by the waves. Her experience of

storm and disaster on that dangerous coast needed nothing more to convince her that somewhere in her neighborhood human life had been, or still was, in peril. She followed the southwesterly trend of the island for a little distance, and, peering through the gloom of the stormy morning, discerned the spars of the sunken schooner, with what seemed to be human forms clinging to the rigging. The heart of the strong woman sunk within her, as she gazed upon those helpless fellow-creatures, so near, yet so unapproachable. She had no boat, and none could have lived on that wild water. After a moment's reflection she went back to her dwelling, put the smaller children in charge of the eldest, took with her an iron kettle, tin teapot, and matches, and returned to the beach, at the nearest point to the vessel; and gathering up the logs and drift-wood always abundant on the coast, kindled a great fire, and, constantly walking back and forth between it and the water, strove to intimate to the sufferers that they were at least not beyond human sympathy. As the wrecked sailors looked shoreward, and saw, through the thick haze of snow and sleet, the red light of the fire, and the tall figure of the woman passing to and fro before it, a faint hope took the place of the utter despair, which had prompted them to let go their hold, and drop into the seething waters, that opened and closed about them like the jaws of death. But the day wore on, bringing no abatement of the storm that tore through the frail spars, and clutched at and tossed them as it passed, and drenched them with ice-cold spray—a pitiless, unrelenting horror of sight, sound and touch! At last the deepening gloom told them that night was approaching, and night under such circumstances was death.

All day long Abigail Becker had fed her fire, and sought to induce the sailors by signals—for even her strong voice could not reach them—to throw themselves into the surf, and trust to Providence and her for succor. In anticipation of this, she had her kettle boiling over the drift-wood, and her tea ready made for restoring warmth and life to the half-frozen survivors. But either they did not understand her, or the chance of rescue seemed too small to induce them to abandon the temporary safety of the wreck. They clung to it with