

Whilst all this storm of conflicting thoughts was whirling through my brain, the turmoil outside was diminishing. The wind had hushed for a while, and across my face there came for a moment a sort of ruddy glow, the last beams of the sun setting rapidly into the sea. The vapors divided for a moment, the huge dark mass of a mountain frowned down upon me—for a moment only—then the clouds encompassed me once more—the glow died away—the awful gloomy gray of night began to gather in upon me like a net.

Should I drop into the sea and end it all? To die in the dark would be more horrible than anything else. Even on the quietest, most resigned death-bed, the loss of light is the most disquieting trouble to the departing soul. Light! more light! is the last cry of the spirit in extremity. And now it seemed as though nature had determined to spare me no pang of all the gathering horrors of my doom. Darkness and despair were settling down upon my soul.

Then came the storm once more with a rush of gathered rain, a howl a shout, a roar of triumph, as the shrill wind trumpeted past, precursor of more furious blast. I could bear no more. A sapless, nerveless form I was, swept from the beam like a withered leaf from a branch, and I fell—catching at some cross-beams as I fell, but losing my hold in a moment, and dropping helplessly down.

Once more consciousness returned. A vague silvery light was diffused about me, above were stars shining, huge balks of timber glimmered overhead. I was stretched upon a bed of wet sand, lying on my back, looking up into the sky.

I was not dead, then. No! Was I maimed, crushed? I drew up one limb after another, fearing lest a sudden shout of agony should betray some grievous hurt. But no! I was sound in limb; and as I raised myself and looked about, I felt that, except for dizziness and a wonderful ringing that was ceaselessly going on in my head, I was unhurt. And I was saved? That was as might happen.

When I rose and stood upon my feet, I looked around me, and saw that I had fallen upon a little island, a narrow spit of sand that had formed in the eddy caused by the pile of the bridge. On each side of it ran a strong and rapid current. All this I saw by the light of the moon, sometimes bright, sometimes obscured, as she parted her way among the fast driving clouds.

Distantly across the waters shone the lights of the little town. It had its gas lamps, which sparkled brilliantly in the night; and from out of the black rocks which shewed against the sky-line, here and there the soft light of a candle in a cottage window gleamed like a fairy lamp.

On the other side of the estuary there were no lights; but the straining eye might discern the gloom of high hills, that seemed, indeed, only like darksome chasms in the sky; but as I watched, I saw a tiny star that was gliding among the rocks. Now seen, now lost, I followed it with longing eyes; and listening intently, I heard the clatter of horses' hoofs, and the murmur of wheels rising and falling, as the road wound in and out among the rocks further or nearer. It was some carriage rolling rapidly towards home—towards *my* home, and here was I a castaway.

I shouted, but my voice seemed lost in the great space. The wind carried it up the river, blew it away into stifled fragments. It was useless to cry. No one would hear me. How long should I have to live? Was there any chance that I might yet escape? I could not