

Cautiously picking her path, Constance followed the eager little guide through a narrow passage. For a few yards the floor was tolerably level, then she came to a flight of roughly hewn steps, followed by another sloping descent, interspersed with occasional steps, till she stood at last upon a rocky platform which seemed to extend the whole width of a large and lofty cavern. She saw, by a faint gleam of daylight, that at the farther end it opened upon the shore, and that the mouth of the cave was filled with tumbling waves, which now and then rushed almost as far as the platform.

A voice crying, "This way—this way!" led her to the farther end of the platform, where she discovered two figures crouching in a nook that afforded a slight shelter from the keen wind. One was apparently a tall man, and he held the other, who seemed to be dead or dying, carefully clasped in his arms.

"Have you brought some brandy?" he demanded, as soon as the advancing light showed him that some human being was near.

"All that will come as quickly as possible," Constance answered. "Take the lantern and warm your hands over it. Give up your friend to me. He is not dead yet, and I hope we may save him. How long have you been here?"

"This is the third day!" the man answered, as he spread out his hands above the lantern. Constance noticed what fine muscular hands they were, though they were shaking with cold and weakness. "We were out for a walk, and sketching, when the storm began. My friend—oh, I forget we ought to introduce ourselves—his name is Edward Ainsleigh, and mine is Ormsby Grant. Ainsleigh has not been well—never very robust, poor fellow—so I made him take shelter in this infernal cave! I beg pardon; I should not have said that to a lady! We've been shut in here by the waves ever since—two nights and more than two days. How did you find us out?"

Constance in the meantime had seated herself upon the ground and drawn the fainting man from his friend's arms into her own. He was very slender, and she took as much as possible of the limp form upon her knees, held him close to impart warmth to him, wrapped her skirts about him, and rubbed and breathed upon his frozen hands. It was nothing to her that he was a rather good-looking man of about her own age; all ideas of propriety or impropriety were quite beside the question. He was a patient and she the nurse; he was a fellow-creature and she a Christian.

Nevertheless, there was some degree of consciousness still left within that seeming moribund frame. He knew that his head was pillowed on a woman's soft arm; he knew that her warm breath fanned his face; and he heaved a tremulous sigh, half wondering, in a dreamy way, if this was an angel, sent to guide him through the gates of death.

As for the tall artist, he was lost in amazement. Their rescuer was undoubtedly a lady—her appearance, her voice, her speech left no doubt of that; and he was equally certain that his friend was quite as much a stranger to her as he himself was; yet there she was, handling Ainsleigh as lovingly as though she were his mother, or his sister, or his wife. He could not understand it at all; least of all did he imagine that she would have done the same for any forlorn child or the roughest seaman afloat. He began to fear that his mind was wandering; so, to recall himself to existing events, he repeated his question—

"How did you find us out?"

"Your dog found his way into our house. We saw he was starving, so fed him, of course. As soon as he got a bit large enough to carry away, he ran off with it, and we followed him."

"Are some men coming to carry Ainsleigh?" he demanded.

"No; we must manage without. You will be able to get along with a little assistance," she said, after feeling his pulse; and, as for this gentleman, one of my sisters will help me. Hark, there they are! Now we shall be all right."

A shrill whistle roused the echoes. Constance replied by calling out—

"Follow the track! You can't miss the way."

A moment later two elegant girls appeared, carrying lighted candles and a basket.

"I hope they've brought some bread and cheese," said the hungry man, looking eagerly at the basket.

"If they have been so foolish as to bring it, you must not eat it," replied Constance, in a tone of authority which he felt it would be impossible to disobey; "your stomach is too weak to retain anything so heavy. I sent for milk and whiskey; that will give you strength to get into the house. When you are thoroughly warmed and have digested the milk and some raw eggs, you may be allowed to eat a bit of turkey. This is Christmas Day, you know."

"Turkey! Oh, blissful anticipation!" murmured the half-starved man.

"Now, dear, give me a tumbler. A wine-glassful of whiskey in that and fill it up with milk for Mr. Grant. Not too fast, my good friend; you will choke yourself!"

Constance mixed a smaller quantity of double strength and held it to the lips of her especial patient. He swallowed a little, took a deeper breath, and faintly whispered—

"Thank you!"

"Don't try to talk. Give Mr. Grant another glassful, Isabel, and then help him to his feet. We must have them by the fire as soon as possible; this cold is killing them."

Ormsby Grant quickly swallowed the second tumbler of the mixture, and then struggled to his feet.

In the meantime Constance, after administering another dose of the stimulating drink to her *protege*, had summoned Isabel to assist her in raising him.

"He will never be able to walk!" exclaimed Isabel. "Poor fellow, he cannot even stand! Whatever shall we do with him?"

"He must try to walk with my help," replied Constance, "and if he cannot, we must carry him. Hold him up on that side while I get his arm around my neck."

She drew his right hand over her shoulder and held it firmly, then passed her left arm round his waist, and, supporting him thus against her, she slowly advanced. He moved his feet feebly, but it was an advance, though of the slowest.

"Now we shall be all right," said Constance; "I can manage him very well. Hang the lantern upon my arm—that's it! Give him another drink. Now, do you all go on as fast as you can; if I want help I will whistle. Bring down some blankets, both the down quilts, and all the flannel garments you can find, and spread them round the fire; some pillows too, and my sitting-up gown—the warm quilted one that hangs in my wardrobe. Take off Mr. Grant's coat, wrap him in a hot blanket, and put him in the rocking-chair, with his legs on another chair, feet towards the fire, but don't scorch them. Pull off his boots and socks and wrap his feet in flannel. Cover him with the quilt and give him two eggs beaten up with milk and whiskey. Do everything you can think of to make him warm."

Sylvia had watched the movements of her experienced sister with observant eyes and a great desire to do what was right and proper in the circumstances.

"Oh, that's the way—I see!" she remarked when Constance drew her patient's arm over her shoulder; and forthwith she placed Mr. Grant's hand upon her own shoulder. "Oh, dear, I can't do the rest; I'm not tall enough! But you can lean on me; I'm very strong, though I am so little."

Perhaps the whiskey had had an undue effect upon the weakened brain of the big artist, or perhaps his sense of propriety had been affected by the cold. Anyhow, when his hand grasped the girl's small soft shoulder and he was seriously invited to lean his great bulk—he was six feet two and broad in proportion—upon the tiny creature, an irresistible impulse seized him. He suddenly encircled little Sylvia with his long arm and hugged her to his side with a strong, masterful, but by no means painful pressure. Instantly the enormity of this offence flashed across him, and he began to stammer forth profuse apologies.

"Pray forgive me! Awfully sorry! Indeed, I could not help it! A—a—a sudden contraction of the muscles! A—"

"Constance, Constance! Oh, dear, what can I do? This poor gentleman has such horrid cramps in his arms!"

"I don't wonder at that," Constance answered. "You can do nothing better than get him to the fire quickly. Boil some milk to mix with egg and whiskey and let him drink it hot. Bring me some of the same mixture—two eggs, mind. Don't wait for sugar; time is more precious than anything. And don't forget the little dog! See that he has plenty of water and milk; not too much meat. Give him a nice bone—that will amuse him. We must take great care of that little dog; he has saved two men's lives to-day."

Ormsby Grant would not trust himself to rest his hand again on Sylvia's shoulder, fearing a recurrence of the cramp with which she had so providentially discovered him to be afflicted; but he held her hand as a guide, and staggered along with the help of his stick. Constance dragged her charge slowly up the rugged passage, and when at length she stood, breathless and panting, but triumphant, within the empty cellar, she was rejoiced to see Isabel approaching. She had brought a chair as well as the hot drink. Constance, strong as she was, was glad to be released from her burthen for a short time. They placed him in the chair, and Isabel put a glass of the comforting mixture to his lips.

He shook his head feebly, and whispered—

"No—no! Make her drink first."

Constance drank a small quantity and then put the glass to his lips. He raised his eyes to hers and smiled before he emptied the glass; and Isabel observed that they were very beautiful large dark eyes.

"Now," said Constance cheerfully, "we shall soon have him in hot blankets on the sofa. How is Mr. Grant going on?"

"Oh, he's all right," responded Isabel impatiently; "tucked up in the rocking-chair, and Sylvia toasting his toes and feeding him."

"I hope she has not given him anything solid."

"No—only this kind of stuff. He seems to like it all very much."

Once more they started on their toilsome journey, though making better progress on the level ground, and in a comparatively short time they reached the hall. The strange scene roused even the benumbed faculties of the half-dead stranger. The lofty ceilings, the rich carvings, the antique furniture, the great roaring fire reflected from the crimson screen, and no inhabitants visible but the three sisters, all differing so much in appearance, yet each so very beautiful, quite bewildered him.

"Where is it? What is it? What are they?"

"You shall know presently," was the reply, "when you are safe on the sofa. Pull off his coat, Isabel, while I hold him up. Now, Sylvia, the dressing gown, quick. That's it. Are the pillows nice and warm? Put them on the sofa; spread that blanket. So; that will come over him nicely. Lie down now, and we'll soon have your boots off. How cold his feet are!"

While they were all three busy about the sofa, Grant, packed up like a mummy in blankets and rugs, watched them through half-closed eyelids.

"Venus attired by the Graces!" he murmured softly. But they all heard it and burst into a merry peal of laughter. Even Ainsleigh gave a faint chuckle.

"You are better already, dear old boy!" continued Grant, looking lovingly at his friend. "Don't see how you could help it, though, with three such nurses. Surely never were two fellows so deliciously coddled as we two are! Lucky beggars!"

He seemed to be exhausted with so much speaking, for his head fell back upon the pillow, and his eyes closed.

Sylvia was instantly at his side, and his head was raised on her arm, a glass of warm milk held to his lips, for Constance had uttered her edict—

"No more whiskey, but as much milk as he likes."

"I want to know where we are," murmured Ainsleigh, as his eyes wandered around the room and rested on the three graceful figures. "We