

10     *THE SHEPHERD OF THE SEA*

tresses merged into an enclosing ring which might have been clouds. The belt of stars paled and thinned and shone dead. Traherne shivered and paddled frantically as he turned over.

The undertow sucked at his limbs. He felt his legs dragging. It was as if a great lodestone was attracting a particle down to the bottom of the pit. He fought gamely. He exhausted his strength. The chilling cold reached to his heart. He gave up, almost too soon.

Sinking down, he was conscious of a bursting pain in his lungs. He emerged with a frantic rally of his long arms. He saw through a vale of mist a white speck that danced and floated and then disappeared. He came up for a second time.

The pain had gone from his limbs and chest. A numbness reached his brain. He felt his mouth open and the water gush forth. He sank back until his ears were covered.

The white speck had grown to a tall spire, showing single and then double. A thought flashed through his mind as he went under: that the white thing should not have been upon the waters of the Strait. It was uncanny with its stately approach.

He felt the kiss of the under brine. It was sweet. He no longer struggled or cared. Warmth