

ADRIFT

"We had best eat something, I suppose. After that—Yes, decidedly we must eat. Cato, hand up some food for the women."

This last remark was addressed to the third man of the party—a negro, who sat flat upon the bottom of the boat, surrounded by a heap of miscellaneous articles.

The old sailor shook his head slowly. "A bad business," he muttered to himself. "I wish the women was safe out of it. Thank God they ain't the cryin' kind—neither mother nor daughter." He leaned forward and addressed himself to the silent figures in the stern in what was meant to be a soothing and conciliatory tone. "Be you feelin' much scairt now, ma'am? Feelin' scairt won't help us any, if you'll excuse me for sayin' so. Jack Winters wasn't built to be drowned, I reckon. I've had a heap of luck in shipwrecks and that's a fact." The speaker paused and laid a cautious forefinger on the bowed shoulder nearest him. "Mebbe she's asleep."

"No, I am not asleep," said a sweet clear voice, the English words spoken slowly and with a decided foreign accent. "But I—ah, what will become of us?"

"Wall, now, that I can't rightly tell you, miss; but Lord love ye, ma'am, there's land in these here parts and there's vessels—in course there's vessels! wa'n't our ship here a spell ago? to-morrow, mebbe, 'ull see us on the way to Ameriky with a better ship under us than *The White Gull* with all her feathers on."

The old man faltered a little as if his confident words had choked him in the utterance. The other woman had raised her head and was regarding him earnestly. "You hear what this good man is saying, Madeline; there is yet hope that we may be saved."