

backwards and forwards; and at last, after many tries, I reached it. More and more came down, till there was far more than I wanted, when I made the knots fast, and whispered to her to draw up. "Now," I said, "as soon as it is tight, twist all you have round the table-leg, and hold on."

In a few minutes, I found the sheet-rope would bear my weight, and directly after, I was holding on by the cabin-window, with those two poor girls clinging, crying to me, and begging me to save them.

I felt most mad, as I looked at them by the light of the cabin lantern. Hair torn down; dresses half dragged from their shoulders; while, right across the face of Miss Mary, was a mark as of a blow, while her poor lip was cut and bleeding.

"Oh, pray—pray, save us," she cried, putting her poor hand on mine, as I clung there.

"As I hope God may save me," I said; "or I'll die for you."

And then there was silence for a few moments; and if I had dared, I should have kissed the soft hand that nestled against mine so trustingly, but I thought it would be cowardly, and I did not.

"And now," I whispered, "I'm going on deck."

"Ah! don't leave us," sobbed Miss Madeline.

"It is to try what I can do to get you away," I whispered; and then the poor girl, who seemed half fainting, sank down, kneeling on the floor, and her sister leaned over her, and said to me: "We'll pray for you, Cross."

"Then I shall succeed," I said, for I felt that I should; and so I left them, feeling nerved to have done anything in their defence.

I soon was over the poop, and crawling close under the bulwarks, when I found that the man by the binnacle-light was fast asleep, for the ship made no way at all. I stopped in the darkness for a few minutes, listening, and could hear voices in the fore-cabin; and it was evident there was a good deal of drunkenness and carousing going forward. Half-a-dozen stanch, well-armed fellows could have secured the ship, I felt sure, as I opened my knife that hung by a lanyard to my waist, and then shoving it open in my belt, I crawled to the skylight, and looked down into the passengers' cabin, where I could see Hicks, Phillips, and two more playing cards, while another lay on the bulkhead asleep. It was a good thing I had no pistol in my hand, or I should have had that Hicks's blood upon my head then.

I crept away from the skylight and under the bulwarks again, though it was as dark as pitch, and began making my way towards the other boat as hung from the davits; when all at once, some one had me by the throat, and tried to turn me on my back; but I was too quick, for I had my knife against his ribs in a moment, and hissed out: "You're a dead man if you stir."

That was sharp practice, for we were both on our knees close against the bulwarks, and I could feel his hot breath right in my face, as he must have felt mine. Just then, he gave a bit of a shift, and my knife pricked him, for I meant what I said then; but the prick made him start so that he a bit got the better of me, and had tight hold of my hand which held the knife.

"Now, you murdering, piratical scoundrel," he hissed between his teeth; and I began to feel that if I didn't look sharp I should have the worst of it. "Now give up the knife, you dog, or I'll strangle you, if it's only for poor Jack's sake."

"Hullo!" I says in a whisper, slackening my hold.

"Hullo!" he says in a whisper, slackening his hold.

"What, Tom, Matey!" I says.

"What, Jack, old lad!" he says; and I'm blessed if we didn't hug each other like two great gals.

"Why, I thought they'd knocked you on the head," I says.

"Why, I see them pitch you overboard," he says.

"Yes," I says; "but I got on the rudder-chains."

"Ah!" he says; "and in the tussle I was knocked down; but I got down below after, and got in that empty water-cask. I ain't been out quarter of an hour."

"Who's on deck?" I says.

"Only that chap at the wheel," he says, "for I've been all round."

And then we had a whisper together for five minutes, which ended in our creeping up to where the boat hung.

"There's water in her," says Tom.

"And there's safe to be some biscuit in the locker," I says.

"But," says Tom, "hadn't we better stop in hiding? We shall be starved."

"Tom, mate," I says; and then I whispered to him about what I'd heard and what I'd seen, when he stopped me.

"Hold hard, mate," he says; "just see if the boat-hook and the oars are in. I'm with you."

Everything was in its place; and then cautiously we undid the ropes, and began slowly to lower down the boat, meaning to fasten the lines at last, and slide down. The blocks ran easy enough, but on such a silent night, do what we could, there was some noise; and at last one of the wheels gave such a chirrup, that the noise in the cabin stopped, and we stopped too; and directly after, some one came up the cabin stairs and on deck; and as we cowered close together under the bulwarks, holding on to the ropes, and trembling lest we should let them slip ever so little, Hicks—for I knew his step—walked close by us right forward, and then back on the other side, where he kicked the man by the wheel savagely, and spoke to him once or twice, but there was no answer, and then muttering to himself, he went below again.

"That was close," said Tom, for he had almost brushed against us; and then we each took a long breath, and amidst a good deal of noisy talk, the boat kissed the water, and we lashed our ropes fast.

"Now, if we only had some more frog," said Tom, "I wouldn't care."

"Don't stop, mate," I says; "there's lines in the locker, and p'raps they've something in the cabin."

"All right," says Tom; and he slid over the side, and was in the boat in a moment; but not without rattling one of the oars, and I trembled again for fear he should have been heard. But all was quiet, and the next moment I was beside him; and as we couldn't unhook the boat, I cut the ropes fore and aft, and then Tom slowly worked her along and under the cabin window where those demons were sitting; then past the window of the captain's cabin, round the rudder, and then there was a joyful cry, for I had fast hold of the sheets hanging down.

"Make her fast with the painter, Tom," I said; and up I went, and next minute stood between those two poor creatures, both of them clinging to me in that sad way—it was pitiful.

"Hush!" I said—"not a sound," and then drawing up the sheet, I just looked at the knots, and made it fast round Miss Madeline, for Miss Mary would not go first. Poor girl, she tried all she could to help me; and so, she creeping out herself, I lowered Miss Madeline down into the boat, and the shaken sheet told me all was right.

"God bless you for this," whispered Miss Mary, as I made the sheet-rope fast round her. "Be kind to us, for we are in your hands."

I didn't say anything, but I did kneel down and kiss her hand that time. She was a deal more active than her sister; and in another minute, I had her lowered down into the boat, and Tom cast off the sheet.

"Shy down some blankets," he whispered; and I dragged those out that were in the cots, and threw them down, and the pillows too. On the table was biscuit, cheese, meat, and cake, and these I slipped into a pillow-case, and lowered down. In the lockers, too, were biscuit-tins, and two wicker-covered bottles; and these I lowered down, for I felt safe now, knowing how soon I could slip down, and that the ladies were out of danger; for I knew, if discovered, pursuit would be vain in the dark. So, as fast as I could, I lowered down cases of preserved

meat, and wine, and everything of use that I could find in the lockers, when, giving a glance round, I thought, now I'll go. I thought the sheet-rope might come in, though, as an awning, so I stooped down to untie it, meaning to slip it round the leg after, and slide down with it double, so that I could then loose one end, and draw it after me. It was hard work, though, for the knots had been strained, and I kneeled at last, and tried my teeth; but they were no good; and I pulled my knife out of my belt, cut the knot, drew up enough so as it should give double, and was passing it round the leg, when I heard a noise, started up, and leaped on one side, just as Hicks stood in the door, and fired at me. He had lowered his revolver to cock for another shot, but he had not time, for I was on him in an instant, with my knife driven deep into his throat and chest; and then, as he fell with a wild gurgling cry, I wrenched out the knife, dragged to the door, and was out of the window, just as Tom was climbing up by means of the boat-hook, for he could not reach the sheet.

"Back," I says—"back quickly, and cast off the painter; and while he was getting out of my way, I had time enough to see Hicks give two or three clutches at the carpet, and then lie still. The moment after, I was in the boat, and with one tremendous shove, sent her yards away from the ship, as it were into a thick bank of darkness.

"Lie down," I whispered to the ladies; and Miss Madeline crept to her sister's feet, while Tom and I got out the oars, and as quickly as possible paddled away, not daring to make a sound, for there was a noise on board, and three or four shots were fired at random out of the cabin window. Then we could see them on deck, and some one fired a pistol off again; but the bullet never came near us.

"They're going to try and launch a boat, I expect," said Tom with a chuckle; "and there's the dingy, as 'll hold two comfortable; and as for the long-boat, I don't think they'll get her over the side to-night."

"Pray—pray, row fast," cried Miss Mary. "Can't we help?" and she moved forward as if to get to an oar.

"God bless you, no, miss!" I said in a whisper; "we'll bend to it directly." And then we paddled a little further off, till I thought they couldn't hear the oars in the rowlocks, when we both bent to it, and rowed stroke for stroke for a good hour, and all on right through the thickest darkness I ever saw, and long after the lights in the cabin window of the good ship *Southern Star* had disappeared.

All at once Tom stopped, and threw in his oar.

"What is it?" I says.

"Matey," he says, "I haven't had bit nor sup since tea last night; and I think we shall work better after somethin'."

I hadn't thought of it before; but I knew how weak I felt, and so I pulled in my oar too, and Tom pulled up one of the biscuit-tins, and found the cheese and a bottle.

"Lend me your knife, Jack," he says, and my hand went naturally enough to my belt; but the moment after I shuddered, and told him to break the cheese, pretending I could not get at it.

Just as we pushed off, I could see by the cabin lights that Miss Madeline had crept down at her sister's feet; but on feeling now in the dark, I found they were sitting side by side; so I got one of the blankets over them, and then, after a deal of persuading, managed to get them to take some of the biscuit and cheese, and some wine. Tom and I took a sup each, and put our biscuit and cheese on the seat by us, and made ready for a start again, eating as we went on, and then rowing as true as we could, so as to keep the boat's head the same way; and without any more stoppage, for we knew what trouble those poor gals were in, starting as they were at every splash we laid down to our work, and rowed on, hour after hour, right away into the thick darkness.

"MATCHLESS MISERY!"—Having a cigar, and nothing to light it with.