

I cannot tell how each of our names has got into the bottom of a hat. It must have been Falsten who has written them on a leaf torn from his note book.

The eleven names are there. It is agreed that the last name drawn shall designate the victim.

Who will draw the lot? There is a moment of hesitation.

"I," says one.

I turn round, and recognize M. Letourneur.

There he is, erect, livid, with extended hand, his white hair falling upon his sunken cheeks, appalling in his calmness.

Ah, unhappy father, I understand you! I know why you wish to call the names. Your paternal devotion goes to this length!

"When you will!" says the boatswain.

M. Letourneur plunges his hand into the hat. He takes a billet, unfolds it, pronounces the name written thereon in a loud voice, and passes it to him to whom the name belongs.

The first name drawn is that of Burke, who utters a cry of joy.

The second, Flaypole

The third, the boatswain.

The fourth, Falsten.

The fifth, Robert Curtis.

The sixth, Sandon.

One more than half the names has been drawn. Mine has not yet come out. I try to calculate the chances which remain to me; four good chances, one bad chance.

Since Burke's cry of joy not a word has been spoken.

M. Letourneur continues his terrible task.

The seventh name is that of Miss Hervey; but the young girl does not even tremble.

The eighth name is mine. Yes, mine!

The ninth name,—

"Letourneur!"

"Which?" asks the boatswain.

"Andre!" replies M. Letourneur.

A cry is heard, and Andre falls down unconscious.

"Go on, go on!" cries Douglas, growing red; his name remains in the hat, alone with that of M. Letourneur.

Douglas glares on his rival like a victim whom he wishes to devour. M. Letourneur is almost smiling. He puts his hand in the hat, draws the last billet but one, slowly unfolds it, and with an unflinching voice, and a firmness of which I could never have believed this man capable, pronounces the name,—

"Douglas!"

The carpenter is saved. A groan issues from his breast.

Then M. Letourneur takes the last billet, and without opening it, tears it up.

But a piece of the torn paper has been blown into a corner of the raft. No one pays any attention to it. I crawl to the spot, rescue the paper, and in one corner of it I read, "And—." M. Letourneur rushes upon me, tears the bit of paper violently from my hands, twists it between his fingers, and looking sternly at me, throws it into the sea.

*January 26, continued.*—My conjecture was right. The father has sacrificed himself for his son, and, having nothing but his life to give him, has given him that.

Meanwhile, these starving creatures do not wish to wait any longer. The gnawing within them is redoubled in presence of the victim destined for them. M. Letourneur is no longer a man in their eyes. They have said nothing yet, but their lips protrude, and their teeth, which betray themselves, ready for the feast, will tear like the teeth of cannibals, with the brutal ferocity of beasts.

They seem to be eager to fall on their victim and devour him alive.

Who will believe that, at this supreme moment, an appeal has been made to the lingering remains of humanity in these men, and who will believe, above all, that the appeal has been listened to? Yes, a word has stopped them, at the instant that they are about to throw themselves upon M. Letourneur! The boatswain, all ready to perform the office of butcher. Douglas, hammer in hand, stands motionless.

Miss Hervey advances, or rather drags herself up to them.

"My friends," she says, "will you wait one more day?—only a day! If, to-morrow, land is not in sight, if no ship appears, our poor companion will become your prey."

At these words my heart flutters. It seems to me as if the young girl has spoken with a prophetic tone, and that she is animated by an inspiration from above. A great hope fills my heart. Perhaps Miss Hervey has already caught a glimpse of the coast, or the ship, in one of these supernatural visions which sometimes float in human dreams. Yes, we must wait one day longer. What is a day, after all we have suffered?

Robert Curtis agrees with me. We join our entreaties to those of Miss Hervey. Falsten comes to our aid. We supplicate our companions.

The sailors stop, and no sound escapes their lips.

Then the boatswain throws down his hatchet, and says, in a hollow voice,—

"To-morrow at daybreak?"

This is the decision. If, to-morrow, neither land nor ship is in sight, the horrible sacrifice will be completed.

Each one now returns to his place and seeks by feeble efforts, to repress his sufferings. The sailors conceal themselves under the sails. They do not try even to look at the sea. Little matters it to them; to-morrow, they will eat!

Meanwhile, Andre has recovered consciousness, and his first thought is for his father. Then I see him counting the passengers on the raft. No one is missing. Upon whom has the lot fallen? When Andre fainted, only two names remained in the hat,—that of the carpenter and that of his father; yet both M. Letourneur and Douglas are there?

Miss Hervey approaches him, and says to him simply that the drawing of lots has not yet been finished.