

with blanched faces, and excited inquiries as to what had happened. They tumbled about the slippery deck, they jostled one another, clung together, cried aloud, and were on the verge of an unreasoning panic. Then Sybil noticed the captain gesticulating on the bridge, and soon the officers and sailors were moving amid the throng with words of re-assurance. There was no immediate danger, only an accident to the machinery; it would soon be rectified; all would be well; the ship had sustained no injury; let the people go below and be patient; should any danger arise they would be warned in time. With these assurances the passengers were fain to be content; and as the vessel was now rolling heavily in the trough of the sea, there was nothing for it but to creep below and take refuge in the berths or elsewhere.

Sybil had not moved from the spot where Tom Playfair had left her. A sailor came up and laid his hand gently on her arm.

"Don't be alarmed, miss. There is no danger. You had better go below. Let me help you."

"Thank you," replied the girl, "I am not afraid. But I must stay where I am; I am waiting for some one. I will hold on tight." And the man, noticing how firm set she was alike in body and resolution, left her alone, and went to bestow his help elsewhere.

Perhaps ten minutes elapsed—though it seemed an hour—and then Tom Playfair came.

"And so you have actually waited for me?" he exclaimed with a gratified look. "I could not get back a moment sooner."

"Of course I waited," she replied. "What is the matter? Is there danger?"

"We've broken our shaft; but I've been consulting with the first and second engineers how it can be mended. It will be a tough job, but we mean to tackle it. Now, wish me God-speed, for this means twenty or thirty hours hard work right on end."

"I'm afraid my prayers would not do you much good," she said somewhat bitterly; "but you have not told me if there is any danger."

"None immediately," he explained; "all depends on the weather. Of course, while the engines are disabled the ship is at the mercy of wind and sea. But we've a good captain, and we must hope that the storm has blown itself out. Now, good-bye. I'll be thinking of you;

and you'll find me here should anything happen."

"He is a fine brave fellow, and I'm not half good enough for him," said Sybil to herself as she turned away, and made a dash for the head of the cabin stairs.

For a time the rolling of the disabled steamer was something appalling, and the wonder was how any fabric constructed and put together by human hands could endure for an hour the awful strain to which every bolt and plate and timber of the vessel was being subjected. As for the passengers, they were not merely frightened and exhausted, but they were in actual danger of life and limb.

Later on, however, the condition of affairs improved. The breeze freshened, and the ship, having been got under canvas, was brought out of the trough of the sea and placed before the wind. In this position the *Peruvian* rode easily enough, and the word of consolation went round that so long as the wind held in the present quarter, and did not blow too strongly, no catastrophe was to be apprehended. Only the course was being drifted out of by fifty miles a day or thereabout.

But even taking matters at the best, it was a dreary, anxious time that followed the accident. There was nothing to be done. The interest of the voyage was gone. The ship was being hourly borne further away from her destination. A change in the weather—and such seemed imminent more than once—might develop conditions of acute danger. Indeed, the only pleasant thing to look forward to was the report that came now and again from the engine-room. The work of repairing the shaft was steadily progressing. So many huge holes had been drilled, so many more remained to be wrought. Now the estimated time necessary to complete the repairs was twenty-four hours; now it had risen to thirty or more. Then the joyous rumour spread that the work had progressed with unexpected rapidity, and that at the present rate the engines might be ready for use after another night's toil. So the estimate of time and the tide of expectation ebbed and flowed; but through all there was the steady current of praise for the mechanical skill and the splendid energy of the men who were so patiently taking their turns of labour under the most arduous and exhausting conditions. It