



DELEGATES FROM MANITOBA TO DULUTH, ST. PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS, SEPT., 1890.

On the Virgin Stalk.

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(CONCLUDED.)

And these men of the coast were not surprised when they found their predictions and precautions justified.

Towards sunset the great black, ragged clouds came drifting in from sea, and a tempest, swift and sudden, of wind and blinding rain and sleet from the south-east followed that hurried squadron and burst with terrific fury on land and water.

As night came on, the roar and rage of the storm was increased by the not unusual accompaniment at that season of violent thunder and lightning, making the scene and hour more appalling.

About ten o'clock signal guns, apparently from a ship in distress, were heard close at hand, and old Pete came up from the next cove, where he lived, to speak to Mr. Wylde, who already knew something very like what he was going to hear.

"There's a vessel on the 'Sisters,' sir," he said. "She wants help. What is to be done?"

"That is what I must ask you, Peter," the old gentleman replied. "Will you go out to her if you can get a man?"

"I can man a boat, sir, in the lower cove," Peter responded, "and we'll wentur it. I came up to tell you that. I've gone out upon nights well-nigh as bad as this, but I never saw a worse one."

The old fisherman and his master were standing upon the terrace in front of Cliff House. The moon was up now and gave light enough to disclose a wild and terrible picture.

The twin reef lay between them and the fishing-village in the adjacent cove, and although the moon was only occasionally visible through wide rifts in the masses of black and broken vapour, they could, at these intervals, distinctly see the ship as she lay wedged between the hidden ledges of her treacherous foes.

The furious water leapt and broke and clambered over her sides with a devouring force that struck terror to the heart of the old merchant, and looked ominous enough to the more experienced seaman.

"Can you make her out at all, Peter," said Mr. Wylde. "I take her to be a large brig, sir," was the answer.

Neither of them said it was the Billow, but they understood each other.

Then Mr. Wylde remarked, "Is there a good boat at the village. No ordinary one will do in this sea, and if you reach the brig it will be no easy matter to get her people off."

"We've got the best boat on the shore," said the sailor, "one that knows how to behave herself in rough weather;

and if we come back ourselves we'll bring the lads out there with us."

By starting from the Fishing Cove the rescuers had an important point in their favour. That little bay was situated a short distance below the wreck, while Mr. Wylde's property lay above it, and the boat would have her best chance of success in the fact that the wind and incoming tide were behind her, and it was settled that in returning from the reef, if they were so fortunate as to reach it and leave it again in safety, they should make for Silversand Cove, by that means securing a continuance of the rather precarious advantages with which they set out.

Old Peter Schmidt went his way and Mr. Wylde, filled with suspense and fear, yet, in spite of both, encouraged by the bold spirit of the practical sailor, returned to his house to order fires to be built in all the available bedrooms, and preparations for a substantial supper to be immediately undertaken.

He did not tell Helena that he believed it was the Billow, with their expected guest on board, lying out there in the relentless grip of the "Sisters." He told her that it was an awful night for making the coast, and that the wrecked vessel, if she had taken a pilot below the harbour was most likely previously disabled and unmanageable.

Her people, if they could be got on shore, were to be brought to Cliff House for care and shelter, but he insisted that she should go to bed and be out of the turmoil. He and the servants would see to all that was necessary to be done and he would come to her door and tell her the news before he went to bed himself.

Helena obeyed her father reluctantly; but she was not deceived by his reticence, and had her own thoughts about the Billow and the friend of her childish days.

Meanwhile, the hardy boatmen were battling with the frantic wind and sea of their merciless coast, but in their strife with the fierce elements skill and courage prevailed, and they neared the doomed ship at last with a cheer that restored hope and energy to her perishing company.

Sure enough it was the Billow, "with one cabin passenger on board," the captain shouted in reply to the first hail from the deliverers.

Imminent as was the danger, there was no panic nor selfish terror in the eagerness with which the shipwrecked men welcomed their chance for life. The captain gave his orders as calmly as he would have done in fair weather, and when Mr. Drummond had been successfully lowered into the boat each man took his turn obediently until Peter Schmidt said authoritatively: "We can only take one more this time. Will you come, Captain! We'll come back for the rest."

"No," was the answer, "the Billow will hold together, I think, for a couple of hours. You're quite full enough already. Come back for us—if you can."

"We shall make for the upper cove now. The tide will

turn in an hour, and the wind lull, 'tis likely, and we'll come back with the ebb," roared old Peter as the boat headed for the shore.

And the stout-hearted old mariner was as good as his word. The violence of the gale lessened as the tide receded, according to Peter's expectation; and before day broke over the still turbulent waste of waters every man who sailed in the Billow was safely landed in Silversand Cove, drenched and exhausted, indeed, with the buffeting of the cold April waves, but thankful for their escape, perhaps (so few of us are thankful) from a fate that overtakes so many a brave crew in these wild engulfing waters.

Mr. Wylde found less difficulty than he had anticipated in carrying out the plan he had formed in connection with Harry Drummond, for a thing happened in furtherance of his scheme which had found no place in his calculations, and was quite at variance with the views of other members of the family.

Mr. Drummond fell passionately, absurdly, some people said, in love with Helena.

"It was preposterous," her sisters remarked, "to see that man, who was now almost a foreigner, making such a fuss about Helena. It would be an altogether unsuitable marriage. It was strange that she could be so silly as to think of it. He would never accustom himself to a new mode of life, and what would become of papa if Helena's time were taken up with a husband?"

But none of these dismal forebodings were fulfilled; and as for papa, he ungratefully turned his back upon his sympathizing family critics and failed to give them any support or adhesion whatever.

Papa was secretly delighted that his daughter had unconsciously proved such a powerful ally in the thing upon which he had set his heart, and the lovers' suit met with his cordial encouragement.

And perhaps no one concerned was more surprised than Helena herself when she discovered that she was of so much account to a man whose love and admiration no woman would have despised. Under the influence of that sudden and magical charm she emerged sweetly from her solitary fancies, and was won out of the fastidious reserve of which men generally had accused her.

The right man had come at last, and no one who saw the eager and distinguished looking wooer could say that she had waited so long for a "crooked stick."

In the former time there had been weddings handsomely celebrated at Cliff House, but never one so royally furnished forth as was Helena's. And now there is a younger Helena Drummond to patter round the old house with grandpapa, to sit upon his knee in the bay-window where her mother sat alone so often, or to lead him out to the strawberry-bed in the hillside garden to pluck the biggest and ripest cluster for mamma.

THE END.