

in the room. The form was that of a woman, clad in elegant garments that were dripping with seawater and soiled with sand. Her face was pale with the pallor of death, her hair hung lank and wet upon her shoulders. Looking steadfastly at Evil-Eye, whose blood seemed to congeal before her awesome gaze, she held up her left hand, and pointed at it with her right. The third finger was missing!—it had been roughly hacked off close to the palm, and the blood seemed still to be dropping from the ghastly stump!

Whether he would or no, Evil-Eye had to look, and for a moment she held him spell-bound with his eye fastened upon this gruesome token of his brutality. Then letting her maimed hand fall to her side she turned and pointed to the bunk where Eric lay sleeping beside Ben in sound unconsciousness. Her face took on a threatening look, her lips moved, though no words were audible, and Evil-Eye, whose wits seemed preternaturally sharpened, understood at once her meaning, for he well knew how close was the relation between the woman whose body he had despoiled, and the boy Ben had saved from his murderous clutch.

As the spectre stood before him thus with outstretched hand and menacing look, the spell that locked his lips was broken, and shrieking out the words that have already been recorded, he knew no more until at broad daylight he found himself lying weak and miserable in his bunk.

Winter on Sable Island is not like winter on the mainland. The nearer presence of the Gulf Stream prevents any long continuance of cold. The snow comes in violent storms, and fills the valleys with drifts which soon vanish again. There is more rain and fog than snow, even in mid-winter, and the herds of wild, shaggy, sharp-boned ponies that have scampered from end to end of the Island for two centuries past, have no difficulty in finding plenty of nutritious fodder in the grass and vetches that grow rankly in every sheltered spot.

These ponies were a great blessing to Eric. But for them and the rabbits, which were even more numerous, the winter, weary and dreary as it was, would have been utterly intolerable. But as long as it was fit to be out of doors at all, he had a constant source of amusement in these creatures.

The wreckers had captured a score or more of the ponies, and having broken them in after some sort of fashion, for this strangely-assorted group had in it men who were familiar with the half-fishermen, half-farmer life common to the Nova Scotian coast, kept them near the hut in a large corral made with the drift-wood that came so abundantly to hand. Now if there was one manly accomplishment upon which Eric prided himself more than another it was his horsemanship. He had ridden to hounds at Oakdene ever since he was twelve years of age, and there was not a lad in the country with a firmer seat in the saddle, or a more masterful touch of the reins. The saddles and bridles at Sable Island were of the rudest description, and the ponies themselves about as wicked and vicious as animals of their size could be. But Eric was not daunted in the least. With Ben's assistance a pony would be caught and saddled, and then off he would gallop with Prince barking and bounding along beside him.

Often Ben would keep him company, for there was an old black stallion that was equal to the task of bearing his big frame, and then Eric really felt happy. The hated abode of the wreckers would be left far behind, and with the keen, wintry air making his cheeks tingle, and bringing out their roses brightly, he would scamper off at full speed for mile after mile while Ben lumbered along more

slowly in the rear. Then, halting for his friend to overtake him, the two would canter along quietly, amusing themselves by startling the rabbits in their burrows, or disturbing herds of ponies grazing in the grassy dells.

On other days they would take their guns, and wage war against the rabbits. Then was Prince in his glory. Had he been born a grey-hound instead of a mastiff, he could not have entered more heartily into the sport. To be sure he was upon the whole rather more of a hindrance than a help, but no suspicion of this dashed his bright spirit, and Eric would not for the world have hinted it to him. His chief usefulness lay in retrieving, for he had been diligently taught to fetch and carry, and soon learned to apply this accomplishment to the victims of the hunters' muskets. The rabbits were not killed in the mere wantonness of sport. There was always an active demand for them at the hut where their succulent flesh made a welcome addition to the daily pot.

But the ponies and the rabbits were not the only objects of interest. The common harbor seal was at the island before him, and in January the Greenland seal came in great herds to bring forth, later on, its funny little whelps which seemed so like amphibious puppies. Eric was so taken with the seals that he was not content until he had one for a pet. Ben accomplished this for him, creeping carefully upon the pack one day, and grasping a fine fellow about a year old by the tail before he could make his escape. After a couple of weeks' confinement in a pen, and constant attention, the captive became so thoroughly reconciled to his new mode of life that he was allowed his liberty, and showed no disposition to run away, evincing great fondness for Eric, who taught him quite a number of amusing tricks.

So long as the weather was fine, therefore, Eric had many antidotes against depression of spirits, but the proportion of fine weather to foul on Sable Island is very small. For a week at a time the sun would be invisible, and storms that lasted for days were of frequent occurrence. Fortunately there was a resource at hand for stormy weather also. Among the spoils of the *Francis* was a leather-covered box so handsomely made that one of the wreckers, supposing that it contained something valuable, brought it ashore to be opened at his leisure. When he did break it open he was much disgusted to find that it contained nothing but books, and flung it from him with an oath, saying that he "had no book-larnin' and what's more didn't want none."

Eric afterwards picked it up and was delighted to discover that the contents were a complete set of Shakespeare in beautiful binding and perfect preservation. He stowed the box carefully away at the back of his bunk, and thenceforth whenever compelled to stay in doors, was never without a volume in his hands, reading those marvellous tragedies, comedies, and poems with inexhaustible relish. He even got Ben interested, and read many of the plays aloud to him, the wrecker taking especial pleasure in those that were full of wars and fierce conflicts.

But despite all this alleviations of his lot, Eric was far from being happy or content. His one thought was deliverance from his strange position, and he could not disguise from himself how deeply shrouded in uncertainty was his future. He had no doubt that Ben would do his best for him, but while Ben's protection availed well enough so long as he remained upon the island, it would be a different matter with regard to his leaving the place,

for then not only Evil-Eye, but all the other wreckers, would undoubtedly in their own interest see to it that in some way there was no fear of his becoming an informer, and bringing the strong hand of the law down upon them.

They often spoke of going to Boston, and Eric gathered from their conversation that with the coming of spring they looked for the advent of a schooner sent out by confederates at that port to take themselves and their booty ashore. This schooner was the supreme object of Eric's hopes. In it he saw his best, if not his only hope, of deliverance, and many an evening when he seemed to be deeply immersed in Shakespeare, was he, in reality, with strained ears and throbbing pulses, listening to the wreckers discussing their plans for the future. Tax his brains as he might, he could invent no scheme that seemed in the least degree feasible. More than once he tried to talk with Ben about the matter, but whether Ben had no clearly defined plan himself, and did not wish to confess it, or whether he thought it best not to excite hopes which perhaps might be impossible of fulfilment, at all events he steadfastly refused to be drawn into conversation on the subject, giving his eager questioner no further consolation than was implied in the words:

"We'll see, my lad, we'll see. I'll stand by ye, never fear," and with this Eric was fain to be content, and bide his time.

It must not be supposed that life passed peacefully in the wreckers' hut on Sable Island. This could hardly be when so many men who feared neither God nor man, were gathered together in a place where the law had no power. Not only were many of them men of fierce and unrestrained passions, but drinking and gambling were carried on to an extent that could not fail to be productive of bickerings and strife. Again and again did violent quarrels take place in which the flash of steel, and click of pistol spoke peril to human life, but somehow, although more than ugly wounds were often given, there was no actual tragedy.

This was due more to Ben than to any other cause. As has been already mentioned, he had carefully abstained from excess in wine ever since he became responsible for the safety of Eric, and his unfailing coolness combined with his enormous strength had been the means of warding off fatal consequences, although it seemed at times as though the floor must run with blood, so furious would be the wreckers' conflicts.

They were an ill-assorted crew. The English portion, who hailed from New England and the shores of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, were quick to make common cause against the Frenchmen from Ohezystcook, Arichat, and the Bay de Chaleur. The hut was in fact divided between two factions, either of whom would have been quite ready and willing, did good opportunity but present itself, to wipe the other out of existence, in order to possess for themselves the whole of the booty that had now accumulated.

Eric took the utmost care to be out of the way whenever a fight became imminent. Indeed, if he was not quick to move, Ben would be sure to whisper in his ear:

"There's a row coming. You'd better cut."

And cut he would, not returning to the hut until order had been restored. This entailed sometimes long and weary watches outside in the dark and cold, but even that was better than being cooped up in the room with men inflamed by drink and greed to the point where a thrust with a knife or shot from a pistol came as easily as a blow of the clenched fist.