

so ill she could hardly hold up her head; and then she had stowed the stores about a bit handy, and made things straight, in a way just as if she hadn't been a delicate lady as had never known trouble before. And now, as I said afore, she and her sister begged of us to stop and have some breakfast.

But we couldn't do it. I knew that every yard now was as good as a mile by and by, and though I felt ready to drop, it was pull steady, though we had a freshener as we went on.

I didn't think as they knew the ship was in sight, for nothing was said about it; but as she was passing a cup of wine over to Tom, Miss Mary leaned her hand upon my shoulder, and whispered: "Don't let my sister know that the ship is in sight."

How that poor girl did work to cheer up the other, as she lay there; and to have looked at her, you would not have thought she had a trouble upon her, for she had a cheerful word for all of us; and as I dragged away there at my oar, it seemed to me that we must have got an angel in the boat.

I did not want to make any more show than I could help, or I would have soon made an awning over where the ladies sat; but we laid a blanket across an oar, and sheltered Miss Madeline, for the sun came down fierce. I could have hoisted the sail, too, and let the light breeze, which now just touched us, give us a help along; but I daren't; and I'd just taken hold of my oar again, when I saw that the *Star* had some sails shook out, and was coming bowling along after us fast.

I couldn't help it: if my life had been at stake, that groan must have come; and just then there was another behind me. I turned sharp round just as Tom's oar hit me in the back, and there was the poor fellow swooned right away.

I laid the oars in, and Miss Mary came and helped me, when between us we got him laid in the bottom of the boat; and then, while putting him comfortable, I found what I didn't know before—that his head was regularly laid open, and there had he been working till he dropped, without saying a single word, or giving a groan. We bathed it, and tore up one of the sheets, and tied it up; and after a bit, he seemed to come to a little, but it was only to talk wildly, and throw his arms about, and stare. So when we had done all we could for the poor fellow, we made a sort of shelter over him; and then, as I was shading my eyes, and looking out towards the *Star*, to see what way she made, I found as I couldn't see her, and that things looked swimming and misty-like, and then back I went across the thwarts, as if struck down. But I wasn't long so, for I soon came to; and as I did so, and the horrible, deathly sick feeling went off, I felt the blood come up in my face with a rush, as a regular wild thrill ran through me, and I closed my eyes, and lay quite still, as if I dare not move; for there was that face bending over me, and those soft white hands were bathing my face; while twice over there was a tender, pitying tear fell upon my cheek.

"Poor fellows! what you have suffered for us," she said, as I got up and said I was better now.

"It was that crack on the head, you see, miss," I said.

"What! were you wounded, too?" she exclaimed.

"Oh, not much," I said; "not much, miss. One of those blackguards knocked me down in the scuffle. But," I said, trying to put a good face on the matter, though I could not help feeling better as I said it—"but I'm only a common, thick-headed sailor."

"Hush!" she said, with such a quiet, dignified way as she could put on when she liked—"hush! Don't speak like that, when you have acted so nobly, so heroically, and—and—may God bless you for it!" And here her voice seemed to break down, and she turned away her head for a minute; but directly after, she was quiet, and still, and reserved again, and tearing up some more of the sheet, as if to make bandages.

"Let me look at your head," she says all at once, and though I was against it, and didn't want her to, she would examine it; and cut

away the hair with a tiny pair of scissors, and then bathed it, and bound it up; and I suppose it was a bad cut, for if I didn't go right off again just as she'd bound it up, and only came to, feeling sick and done up, and without a bit of life left in me hardly. The sun came down fiercer and fiercer, so that we were all soon parched with thirst, and glad of the water, as there was fortunately a good drop of; and Miss Mary wetted our lips for us from time to time, for after about an hour, I gave up, and was obliged to lie still.

And all this time the ship came slowly nearer and nearer, and Miss Mary told me from time to time as I asked her, and she did it, too, without moving a muscle; and at last, towards evening, when we knew they must see us as they came slowly on, Miss Mary kneeled down by me to put the bandage more comfortable, and then whispered to me with her face and lips, too, quite white: "Was any one killed last night when you escaped?"

I couldn't do anything else, and so I said: "Yes."

"Who was it?" she said again in a voice that didn't seem to belong to her.

"It was his own fault," I said: "it was to save my own life."

"Was it that fiend who shot poor papa?" she whispered.

"Yes," I said; and then she closed her eyes for a bit, and did not speak; but after a time she leaned closer to me, so that I could feel her breath upon my face, and then she whispered: "We shall be taken again, shall we not?"

I could not answer, but I knew that if the wind freshened ever so little they would be alongside us by dark. But she wanted no answer, for she read it all in my face.

"God bless you, brave, noble man!" she said: "then we must join poor papa;" and then she seemed as if she would say something more, but did not speak for perhaps half an hour; when, as the wind freshened, and the ship came bowling along towards us, she spoke again in a whisper.

"You know, if we are taken, what is in store for us; and I suppose," she said mournfully, "they will not be merciful to you?"

I gave my head a shake.

"Then," she said, with quite a smile on her beautiful lips, "I want you to promise, on your oath as a man, that we shall not—poor sister and me—fall alive into the hands of those monsters."

"What do you mean?" I says, falling all of a tremble, and with the sweat standing on my forehead. "What do you mean?"

"For God's sake—for the sake of your own mother—by all you hold dear and holy," she whispered, "kill us both."

"I couldn't—I couldn't," I groaned.

"Would you sooner see me do it?" she said quietly.

I could not speak, for I felt choking. I could do nothing but gaze in a wild sort of way at the beautiful creature who was talking so calmly and patiently of death.

"There is no mercy from those monsters," she said—"so promise," and she took both my hands, and I promised; for the blood seemed to rush through my veins again as she held my hands, and I thought of the cries and prayers I heard as I hung on by the rudder-chains, and then I felt that I should sooner clasp her in my arms, and plunge overboard, than that one of those ruffians should ever again lay a finger upon her.

"I swear it," I says; and then, with a choky, husky voice I says: "And you'll forgive me?"

"Yes," she says; "and pray for you. And now I feel calm."

On came the ship, with the wind freshening every minute, so that our little boat began to dance a little on the waves. The sun sunk down lower and lower, and the cool breeze seemed quite to revive me, so that I sat up, and then helped Miss Madeline to sit up as well; when, with poor Tom fast asleep, I sat down in the stern-sheets waiting for the end, with those two well-born ladies, one on each side, clasping my hands, and trusting to me to save them, but not from death. In the calm of that golden,

glorious evening there was more than one prayer said aloud by a sweet and touching voice, as I sat thinking how hard it was to die so young; and there we sat, with the vessel coming nearer and nearer, but not to touch our boat, for with the boat-hook near at hand I was ready to drive out a plank or two when I saw it was time; and there we sat waiting for the end.

CHAPTER VII.

"Another quarter of an hour, and then death," I muttered as I thought to myself; but they both heard it, and Miss Mary looked up in my face with so sweet and heavenly a smile as she said: "Yes, dear friend; and rest where there is no more sin and suffering, no more pain and sorrow. But a little while, and we shall be at peace."

It was not for such as me to answer her; but her sweet calmness seemed to nerve my arm, and as the ship came nearer and nearer, I drew the boat-hook closer to my hand, and laid it across the boat. The sun was now just dipping, and roused and excited as I felt then, it seemed to me that the broad red path which stretched along the waves would be the one we should take; and certain as death then seemed, I don't know that I felt to dread it so very much, for there was so much pity, so much sorrow for the young and beautiful girls by my side.

"Very soon now," said Miss Mary; and with a wild, strange look, she laid her hand upon my knife, which stuck in my belt, and taking it, tried, with her tender fingers, to open the great blade, while her sister, seeing the movement, covered her face with her hands, and slipped fainting off the seat.

"Poor Maddy! good-bye!" said Miss Mary, kneeling by her, and kissing her pale face; and then she glanced at the ship, and then fixed her eyes on mine as I held the great open-bladed knife in my hand. "I will not flinch," she whispered.

"Not with this," I said hoarsely; "it's stained with his foul blood;" and cutting the lanyard which held it, I threw it overboard. "No," I says, "I could not do that; we'll go down together."

As I looked at her, I remembered some words I had read in the Testament about seeing Stephen's face shine like the face of an angel. I've said that hers was an angel's face, but if I had thought so before, how much more did it seem so now, in its sad, mournful beauty, with her bright, golden hair hanging down loose, and the deep glow from the setting sun, half beneath the water, full upon her; and the sight of this made me hesitate, for it seemed impossible that man could wrong one so beautiful; and though my hand was stretched out to take hold of the boat-hook, I drew it back; when she saw what was passing, and whispered: "Your promise!" and then I called up those dreadful cries again; seized the boat-hook, and stood up, watching the bearing down of the ship, with the water foaming beneath her bows, and the golden sunlight seeming to creep up her masts till all below was in shadow; and nearer and nearer she came, as though to run us down.

I gave one look at Miss Mary, whose eyes were now closed; and with clasped hands, and a sweet smile still playing on her lips, she kneeled by her sister, waiting for the end, now so near.

And nearer and nearer still came the ship; but now the shadow deepened, for we were where there was no twilight, but a quick change from day to night. I could now see plainly the faces on board, and see that preparations were being made for shortening sail; and then I laughed, for I knew what our old ship was, and that she would shoot by far enough before they could bring her to.

They saw me standing up with the boat-hook, and, I suppose, thought I meant to hook on when they brought up, but, in another minute, it would have gone through the bottom of the boat with a crash. I looked towards poor Tom, who lay asleep; Miss Mary was still on her knees, beside her fainting sister; and I felt that the moment had come; when, with a prayer for mercy—one learned years upon years before, and which now came rushing to my lips—I