

hated lying as one dead before her in the moonlight, the cold, the hurry of the night, — small wonder if her spirit failed her for a time. I felt her hand touch mine where it rested upon the tiller. "Captain Percy," she murmured, with a little sobbing breath.

I leaned across the tiller and addressed the favorite. "My lord," I said, "courtesy to prisoners is one thing, and freedom from restraint and license of tongue is another. Here at the stern the boat is somewhat heavily freighted. Your lordship will oblige me if you will go forward where there is room enough and to spare."

His black brows drew together. "And what if I refuse, sir?" he demanded haughtily.

"I have rope here," I answered, "and to aid me the gentleman who once before to-night, and in despite of your struggles, lifted you in his arms like an infant. We will tie you hand and foot, and lay you in the bottom of the boat. If you make too much trouble, there is always the river. My lord, you are not now at Whitehall. You are with desperate men, outlaws who have no king, and so fear no king's minions. Will you go free, or will you go bound? Go you shall, one way or the other."

He looked at me with rage and hatred in his face. Then, with a laugh that was not good to hear and a shrug of the shoulders, he went forward to bear Diccon company in the bow.

## CHAPTER XX

### IN WHICH WE ARE IN DESPERATE CASE

"GOD walketh upon the sea as he walketh upon the land," said the minister. "The sea is his and we are his. He will do what it liketh him with his own." As he spoke he looked with a steadfast soul into the black hollow of the wave that combed above us, threatening destruction.

The wave broke, and the boat still lived. Borne high upon the shoulder of the next rolling hill, we looked north, south, east, and west, and saw only a waste of livid, ever forming, ever breaking waves, a gray sky streaked with darker gray shifting vapor, and a horizon impenetrably veiled. Where we were in the great bay, in what direction we were being driven, how near we might be to the open sea or to some fatal shore, we knew not. What we did know was that both masts were gone, that we must bail the boat without ceasing if we would keep it from swamping, that the wind was doing an apparently impossible thing and rising higher and higher, and that the waves which buffeted us from one to the other were hourly swelling to a more monstrous bulk.

We had come into the wider waters at dawn, and still under canvas. An hour later, off Point Comfort, a bare mast contented us; we had hardly gotten the sail in when mast and all went overboard. That had been hours ago.

A common peril is a mighty leveler of barriers. Scant time was there in that boat to make distinction between friend and foe. As one man we fought the element which would devour us. Each took his turn at the bailing, each watched for the next great wave before which we must cower, clinging with numbed hands to gunwale and thwart. We fared alike, toiled alike, and suffered alike, only that the minister and I cared for Mistress Percy, asking no help from the others.

The King's ward endured all without a murmur. She was cold, she was worn with watching and terror, she was wounded; each moment Death raised his arm to strike, but she sat there dauntless, and looked him in the face with a smile upon her own. If, wearied out, we had given up the fight, her look would have spurred us on to wrestle with our fate to the last gasp. She sat between Sparrow and me, and as best we might we shielded her from the drenching seas and the icy wind. Morning had shown me the blood upon her sleeve, and I had cut away the cloth from the white arm, and had washed the wound with wine and bound it up. If, for my fee, I should have liked to press my lips upon the blue-veined marble, still I did it not.

When, a week before, I had stored the boat with food and drink and had brought it to that lonely wharf, I had thought that if at the last my wife willed to flee I would attempt to reach the bay, and passing out between the capes would go to the north. Given an open boat and the tempestuous seas of November, there might be one chance out of a hundred of our reaching Manhattan and the Dutch, who might or might not give us refuge. She had willed to flee, and



MAST AND ALL WENT OVERBOARD

we were upon our journey, and the one chance had vanished. That wan, monotonous, cold, and clinging mist had shrouded us for our burial, and our grave yawned beneath us.

The day passed and the night came, and still we fought the sea, and still the wind drove us whither it would. The night passed and the second morning came, and found us yet alive. My wife lay now at my feet, her head pillowed upon the bundle she had brought from the minister's house. Too weak for speech, waiting in pain and cold and terror for death to bring her warmth and life, the knightly spirit yet lived in her eyes, and she smiled when I bent over her with wine to moisten her lips. At length she began to wander in her mind, and to speak of summer days and flowers. A hand held my heart in a slowly tightening grip of iron, and the tears ran down the minister's cheeks. The man who had darkened her young life, bringing her to this, looked at her with an ashen face.

As the day wore on, the gray of the sky paled to a dead man's hue and the wind lessened, but the waves were still mountain high. One moment we poised, like the gulls that now screamed about us, upon some giddy summit, the sky alone above and around us; the next we sank into dark green and glassy caverns. Suddenly the wind fell away, veered, and rose again like a giant refreshed.

Dicon started, put his hand to his ear, then sprang to his feet. "Breakers!" he cried hoarsely.

We listened with straining ears. He was right. The low, ominous murmur changed to a distant roar, grew louder yet, and yet louder, and was no longer distant.

"It will be the sand islets off Cape Charles, sir," he said. I nodded. He and I knew there was no need of words.

The sky grew paler and paler, and soon upon the woof of the clouds a splash of dull yellow showed where the sun would be. The fog rose, laying bare the desolate ocean. Before us were two very small islands, mere handfuls of sand, lying side by side, and encompassed half by the open sea, half by stiller waters diked in by marshes and sand bars. A coarse, scanty grass and a few stunted trees with branches bending away from the sea lived upon them, but nothing else. Over them and over the marshes and the sand banks circled myriads of great white gulls. Their harsh, unearthly voices came to us faintly, and increased the desolation of earth and sky and sea.

To the shell-strewn beach of the outer of the two islets raced long lines of surf, and between us and it lurked a sand bar, against which the great rollers dashed with a bull-like roar. The wind drove us straight upon this bar. A moment of deadly peril and it had us fast, holding us for the waves to beat our life out. The boat listed, then rested, quivering through all its length. The waves pounded against its side, each watery battering-ram dissolving in foam and spray but to give place to another, and yet it held together, and yet we lived. How long it would hold we could not tell; we only knew it could not be for long. The inclination of the boat was not so great but that, with caution, we might move about. There were on board rope and an axe. With the latter I cut away the thwarts and the decking in the bow, and Diccon and I made a small raft. When it was finished, I lifted my wife in my arms and laid her upon

it and lashed her to it with the rope. She smiled like a child, then closed her eyes. "I have gathered primroses until I am tired," she said. "I will sleep here a little in the sunshine, and when I awake I will make you a cowslip ball."

Time passed, and the groaning, trembling timbers still held together. The wind fell, the sky became blue, and the sun shone. Another while, and the waves were less mountainous and beat less furiously against the boat. Hope brightened before us. To strong swimmers the distance to the islet was trifling; if the boat would but last until the sea subsided, we might gain the beach. What we would do upon that barren spot, where was neither man nor brute, food nor water, was a thing that we had not the time to consider. It was land that we craved.

Another hour, and the sea still fell. Another, and a wave struck the boat with force. "The sea is coming in!" cried the minister.

"Ay," I answered. "She will go to pieces now."

The minister rose to his feet. "I am no mariner," he said, "but once in the water I can swim you like any fish. There have been times when I have reproached the Lord for that he eased a poor silly humble preacher like me with the strength and seeming of some mighty man of old, and there have been times when I have thanked him for that strength. I thank him now. Captain Percy, if you will trust the lady to me, I will take her safely to that shore."

I raised my head from the figure over which I was bending, and looked first at the still tumultuous sea, and then at the gigantic frame of the minister. When we had made that frail raft no swimmer could have lived in that shock of waves; now there was a chance

for all, and for the minister, with his great strength, the greatest I have ever seen in any man, a double chance. I took her from the raft and gave her into his arms. A minute later the boat went to pieces.

Side by side Sparrow and I buffeted the sea. He held the King's ward in one arm, and he bore her safely over the huge swells and through the onslaught of the breaking waves. I could thank God for his strength, and trust her to it. For the other three of us, we were all strong swimmers, and though bruised and beat about, we held our own. Each wave, overcome, left us nearer the islet, — a little while and our feet touched bottom. A short struggle with the tremendous surf and we were out of the maw of the sea, but out upon a desolate islet, a mere hand's-breadth of sand and shell in a lonely ocean, some three leagues from the mainland of Accomac, and upon it neither food nor water. We had the clothes upon our backs, and my lord and I had kept our swords. I had a knife, and Diccon too was probably armed. The flint and steel and tinder box within my pouch made up our store.

The minister laid the woman whom he carried upon the pebbles, fell upon his knees, and lifted his rugged face to heaven. I too knelt, and with my hand upon her heart said my own prayer in my own way. My lord stood with unbent head, his eyes upon that still white face, but Diccon turned abruptly and strode off to a low ridge of sand, from the top of which one might survey the entire island.

In two minutes he was back again. "There's plenty of driftwood further up the beach," he announced, "and a mort of dried seaweed. At least we need n't freeze."

The great bonfire that we made roared and crackled, sending out a most cheerful heat and light. Under that genial breath the color came slowly back to madam's cheek and lip, and her heart beat more strongly. Presently she turned under my hand, and with a sigh pillowed her head upon her arm and went to sleep in that blessed warmth like a little child.

We who had no mind for sleep sat there beside the fire and watched the sun sink behind the low black line of the mainland, now plainly visible in the cleared air. It dyed the waves blood red, and shot out one long ray to crimson a single floating cloud, no larger than a man's hand, high in the blue. Sea birds, a countless multitude, went to and fro with harsh cries from island to marsh, and marsh to island. The marshes were still green; they lay, a half moon of fantastic shapes, each parted from the other by pink water. Beyond them was the inlet dividing us from the mainland, and that inlet was three leagues in width. We turned and looked seaward. Naught but leaping waves white-capped to the horizon.

"We touched here the time we went against the French at Port Royal and St. Croix," I said. "We had heard a rumor that the Bermuda pirates had hidden gold here. Argall and I went over every foot of it."

"And found no water?" questioned the minister.

"And found no water."

The light died from the west and from the sea beneath, and the night fell. When with the darkness the sea fowl ceased their clamor, a dreadful silence suddenly enfolded us. The rush of the surf made no difference; the ear heard it, but to the mind there was no sound. The sky was thick with stars; every

moment one shot, and the trail of white fire it left behind melted into the night silently like snowflakes. There was no wind. The moon rose out of the sea, and lent the sandy isle her own pallor. Here and there, back amongst the dunes, the branches of a low and leafless tree writhed upward like dark fingers thrust from out the spectral earth. The ocean, quiet now, dreamed beneath the moon and cared not for the five lives it had cast upon that span of sand.

We piled driftwood and tangles of seaweed upon our fire, and it flamed and roared and broke the silence. Diccon, going to the landward side of the islet, found some oysters, which we roasted and ate; but we had nor wine nor water with which to wash them down.

"At least there are here no foes to fear," quoth my lord. "We may all sleep to-night; and zooks! we shall need it!" He spoke frankly, with an open face.

"I will take one watch, if you will take the other," I said to the minister.

He nodded. "I will watch until midnight."

It was long past that time when he roused me from where I lay at Mistress Percy's feet.

"I should have relieved you long ago," I told him.

He smiled. The moon, now high in the heavens, shone upon and softened his rugged features. I thought I had never seen a face so filled with tenderness and hope and a sort of patient power. "I have been with God," he said simply. "The starry skies and the great ocean and the little shells beneath my hand, — how wonderful are thy works, O Lord! What is man that thou art mindful of him? And yet not a sparrow falleth" —

I rose and sat by the fire, and he laid himself down upon the sand beside me.

"Master Sparrow," I asked, "have you ever suffered thirst?"

"No," he answered. We spoke in low tones, lest we should wake her. Diccon and my lord, upon the other side of the fire, were sleeping heavily.

"I have," I said. "Once I lay upon a field of battle throughout a summer day, sore wounded and with my dead horse across my body. I shall forget the horror of that lost field and the torment of that weight before I forget the thirst."

"You think there is no hope?"

"What hope should there be?"

He was silent. Presently he turned and looked at the King's ward where she lay in the rosy light; then his eyes came back to mine.

"If it comes to the worst I shall put her out of her torment," I said.

He bowed his head and we sat in silence, our gaze upon the ground between us, listening to the low thunder of the surf and the crackling of the fire. "I love her," I said at last. "God help me!"

He put his finger to his lips. She had stirred and opened her eyes. I knelt beside her, and asked her how she did and if she wanted aught.

"It is warm," she said wonderingly.

"You are no longer in the boat," I told her. "You are safe upon the land. You have been sleeping here by the fire that we kindled."

An exquisite smile just lit her face, and her eyelids drooped again. "I am so tired," she said drowsily, "that I will sleep a little longer. Will you bring me some water, Captain Percy? I am very thirsty."

After a moment I said gently, "I will go get it, madam." She made no answer; she was already asleep. Nor did Sparrow and I speak again. He laid himself down with his face to the ocean, and I sat with my head in my hands, and thought and thought, to no purpose.

## CHAPTER XXI

## IN WHICH A GRAVE IS DIGGED

WHEN the stars had gone out and the moon begun to pale, I raised my face from my hands. Only a few glowing embers remained of the fire, and the drift-wood that we had collected was exhausted. I thought that I would gather more, and build up the fire against the time when the others should awake. The drift-wood lay in greatest quantity some distance up the beach, against a low ridge of sand dunes. Beyond these the islet tapered off to a long gray point of sand and shell. Walking toward this point in the first pale light of dawn, I chanced to raise my eyes, and beheld riding at anchor beyond the spit of sand a ship.

I stopped short and rubbed my eyes. She lay there on the sleeping ocean like a dream ship, her masts and rigging black against the pallid sky, the mist that rested upon the sea enfolding half her hull. She might have been of three hundred tons burthen; she was black and two-decked, and very high at poop and fore-castle, and she was heavily armed. My eyes traveled from the ship to the shore, and there dragged up on the point, the oars within it, was a boat.

At the head of the beach, beyond the line of shell and weed, the sand lay piled in heaps. With these friendly hillocks between me and the sea, I crept on as silently as I might, until I reached a point just above the boat. Here I first heard voices. I went a