



Jack Tier

or, the Florida Reef



Part 1: Chapter 8

Ay, fare you well, fair gentleman.

—As You Like It.

While the tyro believes the vessel is about to capsize at every puff of wind, the practised seaman alone knows when danger truly besets him in this particular form. Thus it was with Harry Mulford, when the Mexican schooner went over, as related in the close of the preceding chapter. He felt no alarm until the danger actually came. Then, indeed, no one there was so quickly, or so thoroughly apprized of what the result would be, and he directed all his exertions to meet the exigency. While there was the smallest hope of success, he did not lessen, in the least, his endeavours to save the vessel; making almost superhuman efforts to cast off the fore-sheet, so as to relieve the schooner from the pressure of one of her sails. But, no sooner did he hear the barrels in the hold surging to leeward, and feel by the inclination of the deck beneath his feet, that nothing could save the craft, than he abandoned the sheet, and sprang to the assistance of Rose. It was time he did; for, having followed him into the vessel's lee-waist, she was the first to be submerged in the sea, and would have been hopelessly drowned, but for Mulford's timely succour. Women might swim more readily than men, and do so swim, in those portions of the world where the laws of nature are not counteracted by human conventions. Rose Budd, however, had received the vicious education which civilized society inflicts on her sex, and, as a matter of course, was totally helpless in an element in which it was the design of Divine Providence she should possess the common means of sustaining herself, like every other being endued with animal life. Not so with Mulford: he swam with ease and force, and had no difficulty in sustaining Rose until the schooner had settled into her new berth, or in hauling her on the vessel's bottom immediately after.



Luckily, there was no swell, or so little as not to endanger those who were on the schooner's bilge; and Mulford had no sooner placed her in momentary safety at least, whom he prized far higher than his own life, than he bethought him of his other companions. Jack Tier had hauled himself up to windward by the rope that steadied the tiller, and he had called on Mrs. Budd to imitate his example. It was so natural for even a woman to grasp anything like a rope at such a moment, that the widow instinctively obeyed, while Biddy seized, at random, the first thing of the sort that offered. Owing to these fortunate chances, Jack and Mrs. Budd succeeded in reaching the quarter of the schooner, the former actually getting up on the bottom of the wreck, on to which he was enabled to float the widow, who was almost as buoyant as cork, as indeed was the case with Jack himself. All the stern and bows of the vessel were under water, in consequence of her leanness forward and aft; but though submerged, she offered a precarious footing, even in these extremities, to such as could reach them. On the other hand, the place where Rose stood, or the bilge of the vessel, was two or three feet above the surface of the sea, though slippery and inclining in shape.

It was not half a minute from the time that Mulford sprang to Rose's succour, ere he had her on the vessel's bottom. In another half minute, he had waded down on the schooner's counter, where Jack Tier was lustily calling to him for "help!" and assisted the widow to her feet, and supported her until she stood at Rose's side. Leaving the last in her aunt's arms, half distracted between dread and joy, he turned to the assistance of Biddy. The rope at which the Irish woman had caught, was a straggling end that had been made fast to the main channels of the schooner, for the support of a fender, and had been hauled partly in-board to keep it out of the water. Biddy had found no difficulty in dragging herself up to the chains, therefore; and had she been content to sustain herself by the rope, leaving as much of her body submerged as comported with breathing, her task would have been easy. But, like most persons who do not know how to swim, the good woman was fast exhausting her strength, by vain efforts to walk on the surface of an element that was never made to sustain her. Unpractised persons, in such situations, cannot be taught to believe that their greatest safety is in leaving as much of their bodies as possible beneath the water, keeping the mouth and nose alone free for breath. But we have seen even instances in which men, who were in danger of drowning, seemed to believe it might be possible for them to crawl over the waves on their hands and knees. The philosophy of the contrary course is so very simple, that one would fancy a very child might be made to comprehend it; yet, it is rare to find one unaccustomed to the water, and who is suddenly exposed to its dangers, that does not



resort, under the pressure of present alarm, to the very reverse of the true means to save his or her life.

Mulford had no difficulty in finding Bridget, whose exclamations of “murther!” “help!” “he-l-lup!” “Jasus!” and other similar cries, led him directly to the spot, where she was fast drowning herself by her own senseless struggles. Seizing her by the arm, the active young mate soon placed her on her feet, though her cries did not cease until she was ordered by her mistress to keep silence.

Having thus rescued the whole of his companions from immediate danger, Mulford began to think of the future. He was seized with sudden surprise that the vessel did not sink, and for a minute he was unable to account for the unusual fact. On the former occasion, the schooner had gone down almost as soon as she fell over; but now she floated with so much buoyancy as to leave most of her keel and all of her bilge on one side quite clear of the water. As one of the main hatches was off, and the cabin-doors, and booby-hatch doors forward were open, and all were under water, it required a little reflection on the part of Mulford to understand on what circumstance all their lives now depended. The mate soon ascertained the truth, however, and we may as well explain it to the reader in our own fashion, in order to put him on a level with the young seaman.

The puff of wind, or little squall, had struck the schooner at the most unfavourable moment for her safety. She had just lost her way in tacking, and the hull not moving ahead, as happens when a craft is thus assailed with the motion on her, all the power of the wind was expended in the direction necessary to capsize her. Another disadvantage arose from the want of motion. The rudder, which acts solely by pressing against the water as the vessel meets it, was useless, and it was not possible to luff, and throw the wind from the sails, as is usually practised by fore-and-aft rigged craft, in moments of such peril. In consequence of these united difficulties, the shifting of the cargo in the hold, the tenderness of the craft itself, and the force of the squall, the schooner had gone so far over as to carry all three of the openings to her interior suddenly under water, where they remained, held by the pressure of the cargo that had rolled to leeward. Had not the water completely covered these openings, or hatches, the schooner must have sunk in a minute or two, or by the time Mulford had got all his companions safe on her bilge. But they were completely submerged, and so continued to be, which circumstance alone prevented the vessel from sinking, as the following simple explanation will show.

Any person who will put an empty tumbler, bottom upwards, into a bucket of water, will find that the water will not rise within the tumbler more than an inch at



most. At that point it is arrested by the resistance of the air, which, unable to escape, and compressed into a narrow compass, forms a body that the other fluid cannot penetrate. It is on this simple and familiar principle, that the chemist keeps his gases, in inverted glasses, placing them on shelves, slightly submerged in water. Thus it was, then, that the schooner continued to float, though nearly bottom upward, and with three inlets open, by which the water could and did penetrate. A considerable quantity of the element had rushed in at the instant of capsizing, but meeting with resistance from the compressed and pent air, its progress had been arrested, and the wreck continued to float, sustained by the buoyancy that was imparted to it, in containing so large a body of a substance no heavier than atmospheric air. After displacing its weight of water, enough of buoyancy remained to raise the keel a few feet above the level of the sea.

As soon as Mulford had ascertained the facts of their situation, he communicated them to his companions, encouraging them to hope for eventual safety. It was true, their situation was nearly desperate, admitting that the wreck should continue to float for ever, since they were almost without food, or anything to drink, and had no means of urging the hull through the water. They must float, too, at the mercy of the winds and waves, and should a sea get up, it might soon be impossible for Mulford himself to maintain his footing on the bottom of the wreck. All this the young man had dimly shadowed forth to him, through his professional experience; but the certainty of the vessel's not sinking immediately had so far revived his spirits, as to cause him to look on the bright side of the future, pale as that glimmering of hope was made to appear whenever reason cast one of its severe glances athwart it.

Harry had no difficulty in making Rose comprehend their precise situation. Her active and clear mind understood at once the causes of their present preservation, and most of the hazards of the future. It was not so with Jack Tier. He was composed, even resigned; but he could not see the reason why the schooner still floated.

"I know that the cabin-doors were open," he said, "and if they wasn't, of no great matter would it be, since the joints ar'n't caulked, and the water would run through them as through a sieve. I'm afeard, Mr. Mulford, we shall find the wreck going from under our feet afore long, and when we least wish it, perhaps."

"I tell you the wreck will float so long as the air remains in its hold," returned the mate, cheerfully. "Do you not see how buoyant it is?—the certain proof that there is plenty of air within. So long as that remains, the hull must float."



“I’ve always understood,” said Jack, sticking to his opinion, “that wessels floats by vartue of water, and not by vartue of air; and, that when the water gets on the wrong side on ’em, there’s little hope left of keepin’ ’em up.”

“What has become of the boat?” suddenly cried the mate. “I have been so much occupied as to have forgotten the boat. In that boat we might all of us still reach Key West. I see nothing of the boat!”

A profound silence succeeded this sudden and unexpected question. All knew that the boat was gone, and all knew that it had been lost by the widow’s pertinacity and clumsiness; but no one felt disposed to betray her at that grave moment. Mulford left the bilge, and waded as far aft as it was at all prudent for him to proceed, in the vain hope that the boat might be there, fastened by its painter to the schooner’s tafferel, as he had left it, but concealed from view by the darkness of the night. Not finding what he was after, he returned to his companions, still uttering exclamations of surprise at the unaccountable loss of the boat. Rose now told him that the boat had got adrift some ten or fifteen minutes before the accident befell them, and that they were actually endeavouring to recover it when the squall which capsized the schooner struck them.

“And why did you not call me, Rose?” asked Harry, with a little of gentle reproach in his manner. “It must have soon been my watch on deck, and it would have been better that I should lose half an hour of my watch below, than that we should lose the boat.”

Rose was now obliged to confess that the time for calling him had long been past, and that the faint streak of light, which was just appearing in the east, was the near approach of day. This explanation was made gently, but frankly; and Mulford experienced a glow of pleasure at his heart, even in that moment of jeopardy, when he understood Rose’s motive for not having him disturbed. As the boat was gone, with little or no prospect of its being recovered again, no more was said about it; and the window, who had stood on thorns the while, had the relief of believing that her awkwardness was forgotten.

It was such a relief from an imminent danger to have escaped from drowning when the schooner capsized, that those on her bottom did not, for some little time, realize all the terrors of their actual situation. The inconvenience of being wet was a trifle not to be thought of, and, in fact, the light summer dresses worn by all, linen or cotton as they were entirely, were soon effectually dried in the wind. The keel made a tolerably convenient seat, and the whole party placed themselves on it to await the return of day, in order to obtain a view of all that their situation offered in the way of a prospect. While thus awaiting, a broken and short dialogue occurred.



“Had you stood to the northward the whole night?” asked Mulford, gloomily, of Jack Tier; for gloomily he began to feel, as all the facts of their case began to press more closely on his mind. “If so, we must be well off the reef, and out of the track of wreckers and turtlers. How had you the wind, and how did you head before the accident happened?”

“The wind was light the whole time, and for some hours it was nearly calm,” answered Jack, in the same vein; “I kept the schooner’s head to the nor’ard, until I thought we were getting too far off our course, and then I put her about. I do not think we could have been any great distance from the reef, when the boat got away from us, and I suppose we are in its neighbourhood now, for I was tacking to fall in with the boat when the craft went over.”

“To fall in with the boat! Did you keep off to leeward of it, then, that you expected to fetch it by tacking?”

“Ay, a good bit; and I think the boat is now away here to windward of us, drifting athwart our bows.”

This was important news to Mulford. Could he only get that boat, the chances of being saved would be increased a hundred fold, nay, would almost amount to a certainty; whereas, so long as the wind held to the southward and eastward, the drift of the wreck must be toward the open water, and consequently so much the further removed from the means of succor. The general direction of the trades, in that quarter of the world, is east, and should they get round into their old and proper quarter, it would not benefit them much; for the reef running south-west, they could scarcely hope to hit the Dry Tortugas again, in their drift, were life even spared them sufficiently long to float the distance. Then there might be currents, about which Mulford knew nothing with certainty; they might set them in any direction; and did they exist, as was almost sure to be the case, were much more powerful than the wind in controlling the movements of a wreck.

The mate strained his eyes in the direction pointed out by Jack Tier, in the hope of discovering the boat through the haze of the morning, and he actually did discern something that, it appeared to him, might be the much desired little craft. If he were right, there was every reason to think the boat would drift down so near them as to enable him to recover it by swimming. This cheering intelligence was communicated to his companions, who received it with gratitude and delight. But the approach of day gradually dispelled that hope, the object which Mulford had mistaken for the boat, within two hundred yards of the wreck, turning out to be a small, low, but bare hummock of the reef, at a distance of more than two miles.



“That is a proof that we are not far from the reef, at least,” cried Mulford, willing to encourage those around him all he could, and really much relieved at finding himself so near even this isolated fragment of terra firma. “This fact is the next encouraging thing to finding ourselves near the boat, or to falling in with a sail.”

“Ay, ay,” said Jack, gloomily; “boat or no boat, ’t will make no great matter of difference now. There’s customers that’ll be sartain to take all the grists you can send to their mill.”

“What things are those glancing about the vessel?” cried Rose, almost in the same breath; “those dark, sharp-looking sticks—see, there are five or six of them! And they move as if fastened to something under the water that pulls them about.”

“Them’s the customers I mean, Miss Rose,” answered Jack, in the same strain as that in which he had first spoken; “they’re the same thing at sea as lawyers be ashore, and seem made to live on other folks. Them’s sharks.”

“And yonder is truly the boat!” added Mulford, with a sigh that almost amounted to a groan. The light had, by this time, so far returned as to enable the party not only to see the fins of half a dozen sharks, which were already prowling about the wreck, the almost necessary consequence of their proximity to a reef in that latitude, but actually to discern the boat drifting down toward them, at a distance that promised to carry it past, within the reach of Mulford’s powers of swimming, though not as near as he could have wished, even under more favourable circumstances. Had their extremity been greater, or had Rose begun to suffer from hunger or thirst, Mulford might have attempted the experiment of endeavoring to regain the boat, though the chances of death by means of the sharks would be more than equal to those of escape; but still fresh, and not yet feeling even the heat of the sun of that low latitude, he was not quite goaded into such an act of desperation. All that remained for the party, therefore, was to sit on the keel of the wreck, and gaze with longing eyes at a little object floating past, which, once at their command, might so readily be made to save them from a fate that already began to appear terrible in the perspective. Near an hour was thus consumed, ere the boat was about half a mile to leeward; during which scarcely an eye was turned from it for one instant, or a word was spoken.

“It is beyond my reach now,” Mulford at length exclaimed, sighing heavily, like one who became conscious of some great and irretrievable loss. “Were there no sharks, I could hardly venture to attempt swimming so far, with the boat drifting from me at the same time.”

“I should never consent to let you make the trial, Harry,” murmured Rose, “though it were only half as far.”



Another pause succeeded.

“We have now the light of day,” resumed the mate, a minute or two later, “and may see our true situation. No sail is in sight, and the wind stands steadily in its old quarter. Still I do not think we leave the reef. There, you may see breakers off here at the southward, and it seems as if more rocks rise above the sea, in that direction. I do not know that our situation would be any the better, however, were we actually on them, instead of being on this floating wreck.”

“The rocks will never sink,” said Jack Tier, with so much emphasis as to startle the listeners.

“I do not think this hull will sink until we are taken off it, or are beyond caring whether it sink or swim,” returned Mulford.

“I do not know that, Mr. Mulford. Nothing keeps us up but the air in the hold, you say.”

“Certainly not; but that air will suffice as long as it remains there.”

“And what do you call these things?” rejoined the assistant steward, pointing at the water near him, in or on which no one else saw anything worthy of attention.

Mulford, however, was not satisfied with a cursory glance, but went nearer to the spot where Tier was standing. Then, indeed, he saw to what the steward alluded, and was impressed by it, though he said nothing. Hundreds of little bubbles rose to the surface of the water, much as one sees them rising in springs. These bubbles are often met with in lakes and other comparatively shallow waters, but they are rarely seen in those of the ocean. The mate understood, at a glance, that those he now beheld were produced by the air which escaped from the hold of the wreck; in small quantities at a time, it was true, but by a constant and increasing process. The great pressure of the water forced this air through crevices so minute that, under ordinary circumstances, they would have proved impenetrable to this, as they were still to the other fluid, though they now permitted the passage of the former. It might take a long time to force the air from the interior of the vessel by such means, but the result was as certain as it might be slow. As constant dropping will wear a stone, so might the power that kept the wreck afloat be exhausted by the ceaseless rising of these minute air-bubbles.

Although Mulford was entirely sensible of the nature of this new source of danger, we cannot say he was much affected by it at the moment. It seemed to him far more probable that they must die of exhaustion, long before the wreck would lose all of its buoyancy by this slow process, than that even the strongest of their number could survive for such a period. The new danger, therefore, lost most of its terrors under



this view of the subject, though it certainly did not add to the small sense of security that remained, to know that inevitably their fate must be sealed through its agency, should they be able to hold out for a sufficient time against hunger and thirst. It caused Mulford to muse in silence for many more minutes.

“I hope we are not altogether without food,” the mate at length said. “It sometimes happens that persons at sea carry pieces of biscuit in their pockets, especially those who keep watch at night. The smallest morsel is now of the last importance.”

At this suggestion, every one set about an examination. The result was, that neither Mrs. Budd nor Rose had a particle of food, of any sort, about their persons. Biddy produced from her pockets, however, a whole biscuit, a large bunch of excellent raisins that she had filched from the steward’s stores, and two apples,—the last being the remains of some fruit that Spike had procured a month earlier in New York. Mulford had half a biscuit, at which he had been accustomed to nibble in his watches; and Jack lugged out, along with a small plug of tobacco, a couple of sweet oranges. Here, then, was everything in the shape of victuals or drink, that could be found for the use of five persons, in all probability for many days. The importance of securing it for equal distribution, was so obvious, that Mulford’s proposal to do so met with a common assent. The whole was put in Mrs. Budd’s bag, and she was intrusted with the keeping of this precious store.

“It may be harder to abstain from food at first, when we have not suffered from its want, than it will become after a little endurance,” said the mate. “We are now strong, and it will be wiser to fast as long as we conveniently can, to-day, and relieve our hunger by a moderate allowance toward evening, than to waste our means by too much indulgence at a time when we are strong. Weakness will be sure to come if we remain long on the wreck.”

“Have you ever suffered in this way, Harry?” demanded Rose, with interest.

“I have, and that dreadfully. But a merciful Providence came to my rescue then, and it may not fail me now. The seaman is accustomed to carry his life in his hand, and to live on the edge of eternity.”

The truth of this was so apparent as to produce a thoughtful silence. Anxious glances were cast around the horizon from time to time, in quest of any sail that might come in sight, but uselessly. None appeared, and the day advanced without bringing the slightest prospect of relief. Mulford could see, by the now almost sunken hummocks, that they were slowly drifting along the reef, toward the southward and eastward, a current no doubt acting slightly from the north-west. Their proximity to



the reef, however, was of no advantage, as the distance was still so great as to render any attempt to reach it, even on the part of the mate, unavailable. Nor would he have been any better off could he have gained a spot on the rocks that was shallow enough to admit of his walking, since wading about in such a place would have been less desirable than to be floating where he was.

The want of water to drink threatened to be the great evil. Of this, the party on the wreck had not a single drop! As the warmth of the day was added to the feverish feeling produced by excitement, they all experienced thirst, though no one murmured. So utterly without means of relieving this necessity did each person know them all to be, that no one spoke on the subject at all. In fact, shipwreck never produced a more complete destitution of all the ordinary agents of helping themselves, in any form or manner, than was the case here. So sudden and complete had been the disaster, that not a single article, beyond those on the persons of the sufferers, came even in view. The masts, sails, rigging, spare spars, in a word, everything belonging to the vessel was submerged and hidden from their sight, with the exception of a portion of the vessel's bottom, which might be forty feet in length, and some ten or fifteen in width, including that which was above water on both sides of the keel, though one only of these sides was available to the females, as a place to move about on. Had Mulford only a boat-hook, he would have felt it a relief; for not only did the sharks increase in number, but they grew more audacious, swimming so near the wreck that, more than once, Mulford apprehended that some one of the boldest of them might make an effort literally to board them. It is true, he had never known of one of these fishes attempting to quit his own element in pursuit of his prey; but such things were reported, and those around the wreck swam so close, and seemed so eager to get at those who were on it, that there really might be some excuse for fancying they might resort to unusual means of effecting their object. It is probable that, like all other animals, they were emboldened by their own numbers, and were acting in a sort of concert, that was governed by some of the many mysterious laws of nature that have still escaped human observation.

Thus passed the earlier hours of that appalling day. Toward noon, Mulford had insisted on the females dividing one of the oranges between them, and extracting its juice by way of assuaging their thirst. The effect was most grateful, as all admitted, and even Mrs. Budd urged Harry and Tier to take a portion of the remaining orange; but this both steadily refused. Mulford did consent to receive a small portion of one of the apples, more with a view of moistening his throat than to appease his hunger, though it had, in a slight degree, the latter effect also. As for Jack Tier, he declined even the



morsel of apple, saying that tobacco answered his purpose, as indeed it temporarily might.

It was near sunset, when the steward's assistant called Mulford aside, and whispered to him that he had something private to communicate. The mate bade him say on, as they were out of ear-shot of their companions.

"I've been in situations like this afore," said Jack, "and one l'arns exper'ence by exper'ence. I know how cruel it is on the feelin's to have the hopes disapp'inted in these cases, and therefore shall proceed with caution. But, Mr. Mulford, there's a sail in sight, if there is a drop of water in the Gulf!"

"A sail, Jack! I trust in Heaven you are not deceived!"

"Old eyes are true eyes in such matters, sir. Be careful not to start the women. They go off like gunpowder, and, Lord help 'em! have no more command over themselves, when you loosen 'em once, than so many flying-fish with a dozen dolphins a'ter them. Look hereaway, sir, just clear of the Irishwoman's bonnet, a little broad off the spot where the reef was last seen—if that an't a sail, my flame is not Jack Tier."

A sail there was, sure enough! It was so very distant, however, as to render its character still uncertain, though Mulford fancied it was a square-rigged vessel heading to the northward. By its position, it must be in one of the channels of the reef, and by its course, if he were not deceived, it was standing through, from the main passage along the southern side of the rocks, to come out on the northern. All this was favourable, and at first the young mate felt such a throbbing of the heart as we all experience when great and unexpected good intelligence is received. A moment's reflection, however, made him aware how little was to be hoped for from this vessel. In the first place, her distance was so great as to render it uncertain even which way she was steering. Then, there was the probability that she would pass at so great a distance as to render it impossible to perceive an object as low as the wreck, and the additional chance of her passing in the night. Under all the circumstances, therefore, Mulford felt convinced that there was very little probability of their receiving any succour from the strange sail; and he fully appreciated Jack Tier's motive in forbearing to give the usual call of "Sail, ho!" when he made this discovery. Still, he could not deny himself the pleasure of communicating to Rose the cheering fact that a vessel was actually in sight. She could not reason on the circumstances as he had done, and might at least pass several hours of comparative happiness by believing that there was some visible chance of delivery.

The females received the intelligence with very different degrees of hope. Rose was delighted. To her their rescue appeared an event so very probable now, that Harry



Mulford almost regretted he had given rise to an expectation which he himself feared was to be disappointed. The feelings of Mrs. Budd were more suppressed. The wreck and her present situation were so completely at variance with all her former notions of the sea and its incidents, that she was almost dumb-founded, and feared either to speak or to think. Biddy differed from either of her mistresses—the young or the old; she appeared to have lost all hope, and her physical energy was fast giving way under her profound moral debility.

From the return of light that day, Mulford had thought, if it were to prove that Providence had withdrawn its protecting hand from them, Biddy, who to all appearance ought to be the longest liver among the females at least, would be the first to sink under her sufferings. Such is the influence of moral causes on the mere animal.

Rose saw the night shut in around them, amid the solemn solitude of the ocean, with a mingled sensation of awe and hope. She had prayed devoutly, and often, in the course of the preceding day, and her devotions had contributed to calm her spirits. Once or twice, while kneeling with her head bowed to the keel, she had raised her eyes toward Harry with a look of entreaty, as if she would implore him to humble his proud spirit and place himself at her side, and ask that succour from God which was so much needed, and which indeed it began most seriously to appear that God alone could yield. The young mate did not comply, for his pride of profession and of manhood offered themselves as stumbling-blocks to prevent submission to his secret wishes. Though he rarely prayed, Harry Mulford was far from being an unbeliever, or one altogether regardless of his duties and obligations to his Divine Creator. On the contrary, his heart was more disposed to resort to such means of self-abasement and submission, than he put in practice, and this because he had been taught to believe that the Anglo-Saxon mariner did not call on Hercules, on every occasion of difficulty and distress that occurred, as was the fashion with the Italian and Romish seamen, but he put his own shoulder to the wheel, confident that Hercules would not forget to help him who knew how to help himself. But Harry had great difficulty in withstanding Rose's silent appeal that evening, as she knelt at the keel for the last time, and turned her gentle eyes upward at him, as if to ask him once more to take his place at her side. Withstand the appeal he did, however, though in his inward spirit he prayed fervently to God to put away this dreadful affliction from the young and innocent creature before him. When these evening devotions were ended, the whole party became thoughtful and silent.

It was necessary to sleep, and arrangements were made to do so, if possible, with a proper regard for their security. Mulford and Tier were to have the look-out, watch and



watch. This was done that no vessel might pass near them unseen, and that any change in the weather might be noted and looked to. As it was, the wind had fallen, and seemed about to vary, though it yet stood in its old quarter, or a little more easterly, perhaps. As a consequence, the drift of the wreck, insomuch as it depended on the currents of the air, was more nearly in a line with the direction of the reef, and there was little ground for apprehending that they might be driven further from it in the night. Although that reef offered in reality no place of safety, that was available to his party, Mulford felt it as a sort of relief, to be certain that it was not distant, possibly influenced by a vague hope that some passing wrecker or turtler might yet pick them up.

The bottom of the schooner and the destitute condition of the party admitted of only very simple arrangements for the night. The females placed themselves against the keel in the best manner they could, and thus endeavoured to get a little of the rest they so much needed. The day had been warm, as a matter of course, and the contrast produced by the setting of the sun was at first rather agreeable than otherwise. Luckily Rose had thrown a shawl over her shoulders, not long before the vessel capsized, and in this shawl she had been saved. It had been dried, and it now served for a light covering to herself and her aunt, and added essentially to their comfort. As for Biddy, she was too hardy to need a shawl, and she protested that she should not think of using one, had she been better provided. The patient, meek manner in which that humble, but generous-hearted creature submitted to her fate, and the earnestness with which she had begged that “Miss Rosy” might have her morsel of the portion of biscuit each received for a supper, had sensibly impressed Mulford in her favour; and knowing how much more necessary food was to sustain one of her robust frame and sturdy habits, than to Rose, he had contrived to give the woman, unknown to herself, a double allowance. Nor was it surprising that Biddy did not detect this little act of fraud in her favour, for this double allowance was merely a single mouthful. The want of water had made itself much more keenly felt than the want of food, for as yet anxiety, excitement and apprehension prevented the appetite from being much awakened, while the claims of thirst were increased rather than the reverse, by these very causes. Still, no one had complained, on this or any other account, throughout the whole of the long and weary day which had passed.

Mulford took the first look-out, with the intention of catching a little sleep, if possible, during the middle hours of the night, and of returning to his duty as morning approached. For the first hour nothing occurred to divert his attention from brooding on the melancholy circumstances of their situation. It seemed as if all around him had



actually lost the sense of their cares in sleep, and no sound was audible amid that ocean waste, but the light washing of the water, as the gentle waves rolled at intervals against the weather side of the wreck. It was now that Mulford found a moment for prayer, and seated on the keel, that he called on the Divine aid, in a fervent but silent petition to God, to put away this trial from the youthful and beautiful Rose, at least, though he himself perished. It was the first prayer that Mulford had made in many months, or since he had joined the *Swash*—a craft in which that duty was very seldom thought of.

A few minutes succeeded this petition, when Biddy spoke.

“Missus—Madam Budd—dear Missus”—half whispered the Irish woman, anxious not to disturb Rose, who lay furthest from her—“Missus, bees ye asleep at sich a time as this?”

“No, Biddy; sleep and I are strangers to each other, and are likely to be till morning. What do you wish to say?”

“Anything is better than my own t’oughts, missus dear, and I wants to talk to ye. Is it no wather at all they’ll give us so long as we stay in this place?”

“There is no one to give it to us but God, poor Biddy, and he alone can say what, in his gracious mercy, it may please him to do. Ah! Biddy, I fear me that I did an unwise and thoughtless thing, to bring my poor Rose to such a place as this. Were it to be done over again, the riches of Wall Street would not tempt me to be guilty of so wrong a thing!”

The arm of Rose was thrown around her aunt’s neck, and its gentle pressure announced how completely the offender was forgiven.

“I’s very sorry for Miss Rose,” rejoined Biddy “and I suffers so much the more meself in thinking how hard it must be for the like of her to be wantin’ in a swallow of fresh wather.”

“It is no harder for me to bear it, poor Biddy,” answered the gentle voice of our heroine, “than it is for yourself.”

“Is it meself then? Sure am I, that if I had a quar-r-t of good, swate wather from our own pump, and that’s far betther is it than the Crothon the best day the Crothon ever seed—but had I a quar-r-t of it, every dhrap would I give to you, Miss Rose, to app’ase your thirst, I would.”

“Water would be a great relief to us all, just now, my excellent Biddy,” answered Rose, “and I wish we had but a tumbler full of that you name, to divide equally among the whole five of us.”

“Is it divide? Then it would be ag’in dividin’ that my voice would be raised, for that same ra’son that the tumbler would never hold as much as you could dhrink yourself, Miss Rose.”



“Yet the tumbler full would be a great blessing for us all, just now,” murmured Mrs. Budd.

“And is n’t mutthon good ’atin’, ladies! Och! If I had but a good swate pratie, now, from my own native Ireland, and a dhrap of milk to help wash it down! It’s mighty little that a body thinks of sich thrifles when there’s abundance of them; but when there’s none at all, they get to be stronger in the mind than riches and honours.”

“You say the truth, Biddy,” rejoined the mistress, “and there is a pleasure in talking of them, if one can’t enjoy them. I’ve been thinking all the afternoon, Rose, what a delicious food is a good roast turkey, with cranberry sauce; and I wonder, now, that I have not been more grateful for the very many that Providence has bestowed on me in my time. My poor Mr. Budd was passionately fond of mutton, and I used wickedly to laugh at his fondness for it, sometimes, when he always had his answer ready, and that was that there are no sheep at sea. How true that is, Rosy dear! there are indeed no sheep at sea!”

“No, aunty,” answered Rose’s gentle voice from beneath the shawl;—“there are no such animals on the ocean, but God is with us here as much as he would be in New York.”

A long silence succeeded this simple remark of his well beloved, and the young mate hoped that there would be no more of a dialogue, every syllable of which was a dagger to his feelings. But nature was stronger than reflection in Mrs. Budd and Biddy, and the latter spoke again, after a pause of near a quarter of an hour.

“Pray for me, Missus,” she said, moaningly, “that I may sleep. A bit of sleep would do a body almost as much good as a bit of bread—I won’t say as much as a dhrap of wather.”

“Be quiet, Biddy, and we will pray for you,” answered Rose, who fancied by her breathing that her aunt was about to forget her sufferings for a brief space, in broken slumbers.

“Is it for you I’ll do that—and sure will I, Miss Rose. Niver would I have quitted Ireland, could I have thought there was sich a spot on this earth as a place where no wather was to be had.”

This was the last of Biddy’s audible complaints, for the remainder of this long and anxious watch of Mulford. He then set himself about an arrangement which shall be mentioned in its proper place. At twelve o’clock, or when he thought it was twelve, he called Jack Tier, who in turn called the mate again at four.

“It looks dark and threatening,” said Mulford, as he rose to his feet and began to look about him once more, “though there does not appear to be any wind.”



“It’s a flat calm, Mr. Mate, and the darkness comes from yonder cloud, which seems likely to bring a little rain.”

“Rain! Then God is indeed with us here. You are right, Jack; rain must fall from that cloud. We must catch some of it, if it be only a drop to cool Rose’s parched tongue.”

“In what?” answered Tier, gloomily. “She may wring her clothes when the shower is over, and in that way get a drop. I see no other method.”

“I have bethought me of all that, and passed most of my watch in making the preparations.”

Mulford then showed Tier what he had been about, in the long and solitary hours of the first watch. It would seem that the young man had dug a little trench with his knife, along the schooner’s bottom, commencing two or three feet from the keel, and near the spot where Rose was lying, and carrying it as far as was convenient toward the run, until he reached a point where he had dug out a sort of reservoir to contain the precious fluid, should any be sent them by Providence. While doing this, there were no signs of rain; but the young man knew that a shower alone could save them from insanity, if not from death; and in speculating on the means of profiting by one, should it come, he had bethought him of this expedient. The large knife of a seaman had served him a good turn, in carrying on his work, to complete which there remained now very little to do, and that was in enlarging the receptacle for the water. The hole was already big enough to contain a pint, and it might easily be sufficiently enlarged to hold double that quantity.

Jack was no sooner made acquainted with what had been done, than he out knife and commenced tearing splinter after splinter from the planks, to help enlarge the reservoir. This could only be done by cutting on the surface, for the wood was not three inches in thickness, and the smallest hole through the plank, would have led to the rapid escape of the air and to the certain sinking of the wreck. It required a good deal of judgment to preserve the necessary level also, and Mulford was obliged to interfere more than once to prevent his companion from doing more harm than good. He succeeded, however, and had actually made a cavity that might contain more than a quart of water, when the first large drop fell from the heavens. This cavity was not a hole, but a long, deep trench—deep for the circumstances—so nicely cut on the proper level, as to admit of its holding a fluid in the quantity mentioned.

“Rose—dearest—rise, and be ready to drink,” said Mulford, tenderly disturbing the uneasy slumbers of his beloved. “It is about to rain, and God is with us here, as he might be on the land.”



“Wather!” exclaimed Bidy, who was awoke with the same call. “What a blessed thing is good swate wather, and sure am I we ought all to be thankful that there is such a precious gift in the wor-r-ld.”

“Come, then,” said Mulford, hurriedly, “it will soon rain—I hear it pattering on the sea. Come hither, all of you, and drink, as a merciful God furnishes the means.”

This summons was not likely to be neglected. All arose in haste, and the word “water” was murmured from every lip. Bidy had less self-command than the others, and she was heard saying aloud,—“Och! And didn’t I dhrame of the blessed springs and wells of Ireland the night, and haven’t I dhrunk at ’em all? But now it’s over, and I am awake, no good has’t done me, and I’m ready to die for one dhrap of wather.”

That drop soon came, however, and with it the blessed relief which such a boon bestows. Mulford had barely time to explain his arrangements, and to place the party on their knees, along his little reservoir and the gutter which led to it, when the pattering of the rain advanced along the sea, with a deep rushing sound. Presently, the uplifted faces and open mouths caught a few heavy straggling drops, to cool the parched tongues, when the water came tumbling down upon them in a thousand little streams. There was scarcely any wind, and merely the skirt of a large black cloud floated over the wreck, on which the rain fell barely one minute. But it fell as rain comes down within the tropics, and in sufficient quantities for all present purposes. Everybody drank, and found relief, and, when all was over, Mulford ascertained by examination that his receptacle for the fluid was still full to overflowing. The abstinence had not been of sufficient length, nor the quantity taken of large enough amount, to produce injury, though the thirst was generally and temporarily appeased. It is probable that the coolness of the hour, day dawning as the cloud moved past, and the circumstance that the sufferers were wetted to their skins, contributed to the change.

“Oh, blessed, blessed wather!” exclaimed Bidy, as she rose from her knees; “America, afther all, isn’t as dhry a country as some say. I’ve niver tasted swater wather in Ireland itself!”

Rose murmured her thanksgiving in more appropriate language. A few exclamations also escaped Mrs. Budd, and Jack Tier had his sententious eulogy on the precious qualities of sweet water.

The wind rose as the day advanced, and a swell began to heave the wreck with a power that had hitherto been dormant. Mulford understood this to be a sign that there had been a blow at some distance from them, that had thrown the sea into a state of agitation, which extended itself beyond the influence of the wind. Eagerly did



the young mate examine the horizon, as the curtain of night arose, inch by inch, as it might be, on the watery panorama, in the hope that a vessel of some sort or other might be brought within the view. Nor was he wholly disappointed. The strange sail seen the previous evening was actually there; and what was more, so near as to allow her hull to be distinctly visible. It was a ship, under her square canvas, standing from between divided portions of the reef, as if getting to the northward, in order to avoid the opposing current of the Gulf Stream. Vessels bound to Mobile, New Orleans, and other ports along the coast of the Republic, in that quarter of the ocean, often did this; and when the young mate first caught glimpses of the shadowy outline of this ship, he supposed it to be some packet, or cotton-droger, standing for her port on the northern shore. But a few minutes removed the veil, and with it the error of this notion. A seaman could no longer mistake the craft. Her length, her square and massive hamper, with the symmetry of her spars, and the long, straight outline of the hull, left no doubt that it was a cruiser, with her hammocks unstowed. Mulford now cheerfully announced to his companions, that the ship they so plainly saw, scarcely a gun-shot distant from them, was the sloop-of-war which had already become a sort of an acquaintance.

“If we can succeed in making them see our signal,” cried Mulford, “all will yet be well. Come, Jack, and help me to put abroad this shawl, the only ensign we can show.”

The shawl of Rose was the signal spread. Tier and Mulford stood on the keel, and holding opposite corners, let the rest of the cloth blow out with the wind. For near an hour did these two extend their arms, and try all possible expedients to make their signal conspicuous. But, unfortunately, the wind blew directly toward the cruiser, and instead of exposing a surface of any breadth to the vision of those on board her, it must, at most, have offered little more than a flitting, waving line.

As the day advanced, sail was made on the cruiser. She had stood through the passage, in which she had been becalmed most of the night, under short canvas; but now she threw out fold after fold of her studding-sails, and moved away to the westward, with the stately motion of a ship before the wind. No sooner had she got far enough to the northward of the reef, than she made a deviation from her course as first seen, turning her stern entirely to the wreck, and rapidly becoming less and less distinct to the eyes of those who floated on it.

Mulford saw the hopelessness of their case, as it respected relief from this vessel; still, he persevered in maintaining his position on the keel, tossing and waving the shawl, in all the variations that his ingenuity could devise. He well knew, however, that their chances of being seen would have been trebled could they have been ahead



instead of astern of the ship. Mariners have few occasions to look behind them, while a hundred watchful eyes are usually turned ahead, more especially when running near rocks and shoals. Mrs. Budd wept like an infant when she saw the sloop-of-war gliding away, reaching a distance that rendered sight useless, in detecting an object that floated as low on the water as the wreck. As for Bidy, unable to control her feelings, the poor creature actually called to the crew of the departing vessel, as if her voice had the power to make itself heard, at a distance which already exceeded two leagues. It was only by means of the earnest remonstrances of Rose, that the faithful creature could be quieted.

“Why will ye not come to our relai?” she cried at the top of her voice. “Here are we, helpless as new-born babies, and ye sailing away from us in a conthrary way! D’ye not bethink you of the missus, who is much of a sailor, but not sich a one as to sail on a wrack; and poor Miss Rose, who is the char-rm and delight of all eyes. Only come and take off Miss Rose, and lave the rest of us, if ye so likes; for it’s a sin and a shame to lave the likes of her to die in the midst of the ocean, as if she was no better nor a fish. Then it will be soon that we shall ag’in feel the want of wather, and that, too, with nothing but wather to be seen on all sides of us.”

“It is of no use,” said Harry, mournfully, stepping down from the keel, and laying aside the shawl. “They cannot see us, and the distance is now so great as to render it certain they never will. There is only one hope left. We are evidently set to and fro by the tides, and it is possible that by keeping in or near this passage, some other craft may appear, and we be more fortunate. The relief of the rain is a sign that we are not forgotten by Divine Providence, and with such a protector we ought not to despair.”

A gloomy and scanty breaking of the fast succeeded. Each person had one large mouthful of bread, which was all that prudence would authorize Mulford to distribute. He attempted a pious fraud, however, by placing his own allowance along with that of Rose’s, under the impression that her strength might not endure privation as well as his own. But the tender solicitude of Rose was not to be thus deceived. Judging of his wishes and motives by her own, she at once detected the deception, and insisted on retaining no more than her proper share. When this distribution was completed, and the meagre allowance taken, only sufficient bread remained to make one more similar scanty meal, if meal a single mouthful could be termed. As for the water, a want of which would be certain to be felt as soon as the sun obtained its noon-day power, the shawl was extended over it, in a way to prevent evaporation as much as possible, and at the same time to offer some resistance to the fluid’s being washed from its shallow



receptacle by the motion of the wreck, which was sensibly increasing with the increase of the wind and waves.

Mulford had next an anxious duty to perform. Throughout the whole of the preceding day he had seen the air escaping from the hull, in an incessant succession of small bubbles, which were formidable through their numbers, if not through their size. The mate was aware that this unceasing loss of the buoyant property of the wreck, must eventually lead to their destruction, should no assistance come, and he had marked the floating line, on the bottom of the vessel with his knife, ere darkness set in, on the previous evening. No sooner did his thoughts recur to this fact, after the excitement of the first hour of daylight was over, than he stepped to the different places thus marked, and saw, with an alarm that it would be difficult to describe, that the wreck had actually sunk into the water several inches within the last few hours. This was, indeed, menacing their security in a most serious manner, setting a limit to their existence, which rendered all precaution on the subject of food and water useless. By the calculations of the mate, the wreck could not float more than eight-and-forty hours, should it continue to lose the air at the rate at which it had been hitherto lost. Bad as all this appeared, things were fated to become much more serious. The motion of the water quite sensibly increased, lifting the wreck at times in a way greatly to increase the danger of their situation. The reader will understand this movement did not proceed from the waves of the existing wind, but from what is technically called a ground-swell, or the long, heavy undulations that are left by the tempest that is past, or by some distant gale. The waves of the present breeze were not very formidable, the reef making a lee; though they might possibly become inconvenient from breaking on the weather side of the wreck, as soon as the drift carried the latter fairly abreast of the passage already mentioned. But the dangers that proceeded from the heavy ground-swell, which now began to give a considerable motion to the wreck, will best explain itself by narrating the incidents as they occurred.

Harry had left his marks, and had taken his seat on the keel at Rose's side, impatiently waiting for any turn that Providence might next give to their situation, when a heavy roll of the wreck first attracted his attention to this new circumstance.

"If any one is thirsty," he observed quietly, "he or she had better drink now, while it may be done. Two or three more such rolls as this last will wash all the water from our gutters."

"Wather is a blessed thing," said Bidy, with a longing expression of the eyes, "and it would be betther to swallow it than to let it be lost."



“Then drink, for Heaven’s sake, good woman—it may be the last occasion that will offer.”

“Sure am I that I would not touch a dhrap, while the missus and Miss Rosy was a sufferin’.”

“I have no thirst at all,” answered Rose, sweetly, “and have already taken more water than was good for me, with so little food on my stomach.”

“Eat another morsel of the bread, beloved,” whispered Harry, in a manner so urgent that Rose gratefully complied. “Drink, Biddy, and we will come and share with you before the water is wasted by this increasing motion.”

Biddy did as desired, and each knelt in turn and took a little of the grateful fluid, leaving about a gill in the gutters for the use of those whose lips might again become parched.

“Wather is a blessed thing,” repeated Biddy, for the twentieth time—“a blessed, blessed thing is wather!”

A little scream from Mrs. Budd, which was dutifully taken up by the maid, interrupted the speech of the latter, and every eye was turned on Mulford, as if to ask an explanation of the groaning sound that had been heard within the wreck. The young mate comprehended only too well. The rolling of the wreck had lifted a portion of the open hatchway above the undulating surface of the sea, and a large quantity of the pent air within the hold had escaped in a body. The entrance of water to supply the vacuum had produced the groan. Mulford had made new marks on the vessel’s bottom with his knife, and he stepped down to them, anxious and nearly heart-broken, to note the effect. That one surging of the wreck had permitted air enough to escape to lower it in the water several inches. As yet, however, the visible limits of their floating foundation had not been sufficiently reduced to attract the attention of the females; and the young man said nothing on the subject. He thought that Jack Tier was sensible of the existence of this new source of danger, but if he were, that experienced mariner imitated his own reserve, and made no allusion to it. Thus passed the day. Occasionally the wreck rolled heavily, when more air escaped, the hull settling lower and lower in the water as a necessary consequence. The little bubbles continued incessantly to rise, and Mulford became satisfied that another day must decide their fate. Taking this view of their situation, he saw no use in reserving their food, but encouraged his companions to share the whole of what remained at sunset. Little persuasion was necessary, and when night once more came to envelope them in darkness, not a mouthful of food or a drop of water remained to meet the necessities of the coming morn. It had rained again



for a short time, in the course of the afternoon, when enough water had been caught to allay their thirst, and what was almost of as much importance to the females now, a sufficiency of sun had succeeded to dry their clothes, thus enabling them to sleep without enduring the chilling damps that might otherwise have prevented it. The wind had sensibly fallen, and the ground-swell was altogether gone, but Mulford was certain that the relief had come too late. So much air had escaped while it lasted as scarce to leave him the hope that the wreck could float until morning. The rising of the bubbles was now incessant, the crevices by which they escaped having most probably opened a little, in consequence of the pressure and the unceasing action of the currents, small as the latter were.

Just as darkness was shutting in around them for the second time, Rose remarked to Mulford that it seemed to her that they had not as large a space for their little world as when they were first placed on it. The mate, however, successfully avoided an explanation; and when the watch was again set for the night, the females lay down to seek their repose, more troubled with apprehensions for a morrow of hunger and thirst, than by any just fears that might so well have arisen from the physical certainty that the body which alone kept them from being engulfed in the sea, could float but a few hours longer. This night Tier kept the look-out until Jupiter reached the zenith, when Mulford was called to hold the watch until light returned.

It may seem singular that any could sleep at all in such a situation. But we get accustomed, in an incredibly short time, to the most violent changes; and calamities that seem insupportable, when looked at from a distance, lose half their power if met and resisted with fortitude. The last may, indeed, be too insignificant a word to be applied to all of the party on the wreck, on the occasion of which we are writing, though no one of them all betrayed fears that were troublesome. Of Mulford it is unnecessary to speak. His deportment had been quiet, thoughtful, and full of a manly interest in the comfort of others, from the first moment of the calamity. That Rose should share the largest in his attentions was natural enough, but he neglected no essential duty to her companions. Rose, herself, had little hope of being rescued. Her naturally courageous character, however, prevented any undue exhibitions of despair, and now it was that the niece became the principal support of the aunt, completely changing the relations that had formerly existed between them. Mrs. Budd had lost all the little buoyancy of her mind. Not a syllable did she now utter concerning ships and their manoeuvres. She had been, at first, a little disposed to be querulous and despairing, but the soothing and pious conversation of Rose awakened



a certain degree of resolution in her, and habit soon exercised its influence over even her inactive mind. Bidy was a strange mixture of courage, despair, humility, and consideration for others. Not once had she taken her small allowance of food without first offering it, and that, too, in perfect good faith, to her “Missus and Miss Rosy;” yet her moanings for this sort of support, and her complaints of bodily suffering much exceeded that of all the rest of the party put together. As for Jack Tier, his conduct singularly belied his appearance. No one would have expected any great show of manly resolution from the little rotund, lymphatic figure of Tier; but he had manifested a calmness that denoted either great natural courage, or a resolution derived from familiarity with danger. In this particular, even Mulford regarded his deportment with surprise, not unmingled with respect.

“You have had a tranquil watch, Jack,” said Harry, when he was called by the person named, and had fairly aroused himself from his slumbers. “Has the wind stood as it is since sunset?”

“No change whatever, sir. It has blown a good working breeze the whole watch, and what is surprising not as much lipper has got up as would frighten a colt on a sea-beach.”

“We must be near the reef, by that. I think the only currents we feel come from the tide, and they seem to be setting us back and forth, instead of carrying us in any one settled direction.”

“Quite likely, sir; and this makes my opinion of what I saw an hour since all the more probable.”

“What you saw! In the name of a merciful Providence, Tier, do not trifle with me! Has any thing been seen near by?”

“Don’t talk to me of your liquors and other dhrinks,” murmured Bidy in her sleep. “It’s wather that is a blessed thing; and I wish I lived, the night and the day, by the swate pump that’s in our own yard, I do.”

“The woman has been talking in her sleep, in this fashion, most of the watch,” observed Jack, coolly, and perhaps a little contemptuously. “But, Mr. Mulford, unless my eyes have cheated me, we are near that boat again. The passage through the reef is close aboard us, here, on our larboard bow, as it might be, and the current has sucked us in it in a fashion to bring it in a sort of athwart-hawse direction to us.”

“If that boat, after all, should be sent by Providence to our relief! How long is it since you saw it, Jack.”

“But a bit since, sir; or, for that matter, I think I see it now. Look hereaway, sir, just where the dead-eyes of the fore-rigging would bear from us, if the craft stood upon her legs, as she ought to do. If that isn’t a boat, it’s a rock out of water.”



Mulford gazed through the gloom of midnight, and saw, or fancied he saw, an object that might really be the boat. It could not be very distant either; and his mind was instantly made up as to the course he would pursue. Should it actually turn out to be that which he now so much hoped for, and its distance in the morning did not prove too great for human powers, he was resolved to swim for it at the hazard of his life. In the meantime, or until light should return, there remained nothing to do but to exercise as much patience as could be summoned, and to confide in God, soliciting his powerful succour by secret prayer.

Mulford was no sooner left alone, as it might be, by Tier's seeking a place in which to take his rest, than he again examined the state of the wreck. Little as he had hoped from its long-continued buoyancy, he found matters even worse than he apprehended they would be. The hull had lost much air, and had consequently sunk in the water in an exact proportion to this loss. The space that was actually above the water, was reduced to an area not more than six or seven feet in one direction, by some ten or twelve in the other. This was reducing its extent, since the evening previous, by fully one-half; and there could be no doubt that the air was escaping, in consequence of the additional pressure, in a ratio that increased by a sort of arithmetical progression. The young man knew that the whole wreck, under its peculiar circumstances, might sink entirely beneath the surface, and yet possess sufficient buoyancy to sustain those that were on it for a time longer, but this involved the terrible necessity of leaving the females partly submerged themselves.

Our mate heard his own heart beat, as he became satisfied of the actual condition of the wreck, and of the physical certainty that existed of its sinking, at least to the point last mentioned, ere the sun came to throw his glories over the last view that the sufferers would be permitted to take of the face of day. It appeared to him that no time was to be lost. There lay the dim and shapeless object that seemed to be the boat, distant, as he thought, about a mile. It would not have been visible at all but for the perfect smoothness of the sea, and the low position occupied by the observer. At times it did disappear altogether, when it would rise again, as if undulating in the groundswell. This last circumstance, more than any other, persuaded Harry that it was not a rock, but some floating object that he beheld. Thus encouraged, he delayed no longer. Every moment was precious, and all might be lost by indecision. He did not like the appearance of deserting his companions, but, should he fail, the motive would appear in the act. Should he fail, every one would alike soon be beyond the reach of censure, and in a state of being that would do full justice to all.



Harry threw off most of his clothes, reserving only his shirt and a pair of light summer trowsers. He could not quit the wreck, however, without taking a sort of leave of Rose. On no account would he awake her, for he appreciated the agony she would feel during the period of his struggles. Kneeling at her side, he made a short prayer, then pressed his lips to her warm cheek, and left her. Rose murmured his name at that instant, but it was as the innocent and young betray their secrets in their slumbers. Neither of the party awoke.

It was a moment to prove the heart of man, that in which Harry Mulford, in the darkness of midnight, alone, unsustained by any encouraging eye, or approving voice, with no other aid than his own stout arm, and the unknown designs of a mysterious Providence, committed his form to the sea. For an instant he paused, after he had waded down on the wreck to a spot where the water already mounted to his breast, but it was not in misgivings. He calculated the chances, and made an intelligent use of such assistance as could be had. There had been no sharks near the wreck that day, but a splash in the water might bring them back again in a crowd. They were probably prowling over the reef, near at hand. The mate used great care, therefore, to make no noise. There was the distant object, and he set it by a bright star, that wanted about an hour before it would sink beneath the horizon. That star was his beacon, and muttering a few words in earnest prayer, the young man threw his body forward, and left the wreck, swimming lightly but with vigour.

