MY PRAYER.

I wonder if there may not be,
Somewhere in God's eternity,
A workday season, long and bright,
For souls belated—whom the night
Surprises ere their tasks are done—
Who grieve o'er golden threads unspun
Because of weariness and set of sun?

I know not, yet it seems more blest,
More blissful were the soul's sweet rest
That sometime, somewhere, shall have wrought
Entire, life's purpose—deed or thought,
And so I pray, "Oh, if there be
A place in God's immensity
Where life work may be rounded—give it me!"

HANNAH A. FOSTER.

JACK'S COURTSHIP.

A SAILOR'S YARN OF LOVE AND SHIPWRECK

BY W. CLARK RUSSELL.

Author of "The Wreck of The Grosvenor," "A Sea-Queen," "An Ocean Free-Lance," etc.

CHAPTER XLV—CONTINUED.

A man feels a situation of horror like this when he has just escaped from it, more than when he is actually in it. There is a curdling of the blood, a sickly sensation of fear in looking down the precipice over which you were just now hanging, holding your life by grasping a root, such as may be you were not sensible of when a five-hundred-foot fall was below you, and the daylight was growing faint upon your eyes.

However, the sound of the bo'sun's voice called me away from these thoughts: Florence and her aunt came aft; and in a few minutes all hands were on deck, and the windlass clinking handsomely, as bit by bit the chain cable was hove in, to a rattling chorus that awoke a hundred echoes in the island.

"Jump aloft, two of you," I sung out, "and loose the topsails. Bo'sun, get the fore-topmast-staysail hoisted. Loose the topgallant-sail before you come down, and stand by to overhaul your clew-lines!" I bawled to the fellow who was trotting up the main rigging. Clink, clink went the windlass pawl forward, and the voices of the men broke away in a hurricane note.

"Hove short, sir" roared the bo'sun.

"Sheet home to the fore-topsail, then. Hoist away the jib there"; and in a few minutes there was sail enough to pay the brig's head off. Once again the windlass was manned, the anchor broken out of the ground, and with the helm hard over, the light old timber-wagon slewed slowly round on her heel, and began to move through the water.

"Loose the foresail. Masthead the main-topsail-yard. Get your main and main-topmast-staysails hoisted. Loose the trysail. Wheel there, steady! How's her head?"

"North by east-half-east, sir."

"Keep her at that."

It was all bustle and singing out, and tumbling about. But never, I daresay, from the hour on which she was launched had sail been made on the brig more rapidly. I'd notice old Aunt Damaris staring at me with wide wonder as I shouted out orders, while Florence, sitting alongside of her, followed me with a smile of pride. When all the canvas the brig carried was set, and she was leaning under the pleasant west wind, that was right abeam, with the further reaches of the island opening out into the sunlight, and the hollow contracting as the island receded. I sprang on to the rail and, with a wild flourish of my cap cheered till it was a wonder I didn't crack my pipes. My example was instantly imitated by all hands, who, jumping into the rigging, and taking their tune from the bo'sun, thundered out cheers again and again repeated. You would have thought there were people on the island, and that we were bidding them farewell. Florence waved her pocket-handkerchief, and I believe the old lady joined in our shouts. Bit by bit the lonely rock diminished in size, point after point fading into brown, and the great ninepin rock melting into the land. The huge blue ocean was before us, twinkling trostily under the play of the pleasant wind, and the old brig, courtesying over the light head-swell, was throwing enough foam off her weather bow to furnish out a wake to make her look to be sailing ten miles an hour.

CHAPTER XLVI.

STRUGGLING EASTWARD.

The sun seemed to grow hotter as he westered, and the sky northward took a deeper liquid tint; but gradually the breeze briskened until, at 4 o'clock, it was making a loud humming aloft, with white clouds in the eye of it coming up large and full, snow-tinted in their brows, and prismatic colors like bits of rainbow in their skirts; their shadows gave a new life to the sea, that was now running in narrow ridges of as beautiful a blue as the heavens, every azure summit flashing into foam. But I was more concerned with the brig and with keeping a bright lookout for land ahead than with thinking of the picture the ocean made, though I had eyes for a shower of flying-fish that sparked out to windward in a glittering flight, repeated half a score of times, and for a gleaming green body that might have passed for a huge wedge of emerald, and that I reckoned to be a dolphin, which kept pace with us to windward in the wake of the timid, lovely little prey it was chivying.

There was a reel-log abaft the deck-house, and I had it hove, and made the speed a trifle less than six knots. This was better than I should have hoped from the bows and run of the old hooker; and yet the breeze now blowing would have sent the Strathmore ahead at ten miles an hour. The only sails the brig wanted were the fore-topgallant-sail and the flying jib; for she carried no royals, her yards perhaps being thought square enough to enable her to do without them; yet, with all her canvas as well set as hauling taut could bring it, the yards braced in, every cloth doing its work, the hull so light that it might have passed for a floating balloon, the water smooth and the head-swell much too gentle to bother her, the Sarah Jane was barely giving us six knots. Well, thought I to myself, if we're not taken out of her by some passing ship our voyage to Australia bids fair to be a long one; for if we can't do better than this under the most favorable conditions which could befall a vessel, what's to happen if we meet with head winds or light, baffling airs?

Three hours after we had quit St. Paul's Amsterdam Island was in sight about a point on the lee bow, a looming bit of blue, with the running waters trembling between it and us. Fourteen or fifteen miles astern was the island we had left, like a bit of amber in the western sunshine. We had another three hours of daylight before us, and glad was I to feel the wind freshening yet, and the bluff bows forward bursting with a roaring noise through the water, for long before the darkness fell the breeze would have brought us well within the scope of any eyes that might be upon the land there, and it was not likely to draw up so black but that a boat could see and fetch us, if we hove to, and waited a bit. All this while all the hands had been full of business, making ready the deck-house for themselves, skinning and cutting up the goats into joints, boiling the crabs and shellfish in capfuls to make room in the tubs for those which were left uncooked, cleaning up the decks, washing blankets (which had been come at by the cook) for cabin use. The bo'sun kept aft with me much of the time, and there was a hand in the foretop with the brig's telescope, working away with it at the growing and brightening island, ready to report a signal or a boat, if ever such a thing should heave into the view of his lenses. A little before 6, when the men were thinking of going to supper, I told the bo'sun we might as well divide them into watches there and then, and I asked him to send them aft, as I wanted to say something to them. His hoarse voice sounded, and in twos and threes the crew came along to past the mainmast, and stood in a cluster fronting the cabin-door. If trouble don't sweeten humanity, I can answer for it that they make fellow-feeling sharp, and find a warm heart for a man to think of his comrades in trouble with. I could not look at those seamen without a kind of longing to grasp every one's hand. Rough they were, and grimy as the deuce, for you see they'd had no leisure yet for a wash-down, and what with hunting for crabs and shooting goats and clearing up the decks, and so forth, their toil had been both dirty and hard; and had you found them, as they then appeared, in a shipping-yard, or cruising along an East End street, you'd have backed out of their road, and passed on, thinking them a pack of greasy rascals, and wondering what on earth the British merchant sailor was coming to. But how well they had done their duty! how uncomplainingly they had accepted the privations of shipwreck! What heart they had maintained, what spirits, what an honest sense of discipline! and could I forget how they had taken their rest in the cold, damp night air, upon the rocks of that iron island, that Aunt Damaris and Florence might enjoy such poor privacy as the wretched hut had yielded them? Oh, my lads, let us always think kindly of poor Jack. Rough and reckless he may be, with more faults than you have time and patience to count; but in my opinion he is never so bad but that there's more good in him than you'll find in scores of men who are reckoned really good ashore; and let ship-owners and captains say what they like to the contrary, my belief is that there's no ship's forecastle afloat that does not hold kinder hearts, warmer feelings, more generous natures, more manly and more unselfish qualities, ay, mixed up as they may be with curses and growlings, God knows too often richly justified, than you'd find in the biggest building in Great Britain, choke full of landsmen, from the nobleman down to the chimney-sweep.

'My lads,' said I, 'I've ordered you to step aft to put a question to you. I've taken charge so far, because a head's wanted and we're bound to make a start. But I don't want to be skipper here without your sanction. You men of the poor old Strathmor know who I am, what my qualifications as a sailor are—the bo'sun told you in the gig. The others belonging to the Sarah Jane may as well hear that I've been second mate in the service to which the Strathmore belonged, and that I held a chief mate's certificate. Now, is it your wish that I should take command of this brig?'

'Most certainly it is,' promptly replied William Somers, and in a breath there was a volley of 'Yes—yes—that's our wish.'

'Very well,' said I, 'my intention is to head for the Australian coast, on account of the prevailing winds in these seas. Is that agreeable to you all?'

'Ay,' they answered: I was boss; whatever I did was bound to be all right.

'If we speak a ship willing to receive us,' I continued, 'I shall of course transfer the ladies aboard her, and myself too; but as the original crew of this brig might not choose to leave her, then, if I can't get anybody from the ship we speak to navigate her, I'll stick to her and to as many as may remain. You've stuck to the ladies and me, boys, you've behaved as English seamen should, in trouble, and last night you acted toward these ladies in such a way that I know they'll not be satisfied unless I thank you in their name for your kindness and consideration.'

The poor fellows cheered this heartily, as I looked at Florence and Aunt Damaris, who stood near me. My darling was blushing and smiling, and glancing gratefully at the rough faces which confronted her. Aunt Damaris, clearing her throat, exclaimed:

'My niece and I are deeply obliged to you all for the use of the hut, and for your excellent conduct throughout. I hope it will be in my power to thank you by something better than words when we reach Sydney.'

Here there were murmurs of: 'We don't want no thanks of that kind, lady. We've done nothen to desarve thanks. We're all sorry that you ladies should ha' been brought into such a job as shipwreck; but had ye been sailors ye couldn't have gone through it with more pluck.'

'And now,' said I, 'who will you choose for mate?'

They answered that they would leave that to me.

'Then,' I exclaimed, 'I choose Mr. Shilling; and as William Somers has had the handling of the brig since her mate has been down with sickness, we can't do better than let him be second mate.'

This was agreed to; the crew were then divided into watches, and all hands went down to get their supper.

'Upon my word, Mr. Seymour,' said Aunt Damaris, 'you manage sailors capitally.'

'These are men very easy to manage,' I replied.

'I think you would make a very popular captain,' said she. 'Don't you, Florence?'

'You will be sending Jack to sea again if you talk to him like that,' answered my darling, with a little pout, and she put her hand through my arm.

I noticed the look that came into the old lady's face when she saw and heard this. If ever she had wondered whether Florence were really in love with me, I fancy, from the expression on her, that her mind then and there was laid completely at rest on *that* head.

The cook brought some tea aft for us and we went into the cabin for a meal. The fellow on the look-out had come down out of the foretop, and the telescope was handed to the bo'sun, who, with the glass under his arm, stumped the weather-side of the deck as knowingly as if he had never been at any other sort of work all his life. The heel of the brig was very great, for the breeze was now a strong wind, and all that the vessel carried she had, and she seemed to be sailing on her beam-ends. Why, even in the deck-house we could hear her lee-channels tearing through the water, and the screaming aloft among the rigging was as though the poor old hooker were shrieking to have the fierce strain taken off her ancient bones. But I meant to give her no respite; especially this evening, when the island was to be made in daylight if possible; and it pleased me mightily to hear her thrashing through it, with an occasional half-smothered roar of water forward when she jumped her round bows into a bit of hollow—a trifle of sea now running—and hurled the surge away from her, while her hull appeared to tremble fore and aft as if she were already breathless and ill with the excitement of such driving.

It was no easy job to make out a meal in that deck-house. The little table sloped up to our mouths, and all that was put upon it slid away in a huddle down to where it was hinged to the side of the structure. There were no 'fiddles,' no comforts nor conveniences aboard the Sarah Jane. It was like colliering; only instead of having civilized coasts within hail, we were fair betwixt the Indian and Southern oceans, midway between Africa and Australia. There were a couple of big crabs cooked, brought to us, and we tried to eat them; but it was a hard job. The meat in them was delicious to our appetite, jaded by preserved foods and dry biscuit; and desperately tantalizing was the behavior of the legs and shells and claws, which defied our forks and all our struggles to detain them upon the tin dishes on the table, and skimmed upon the deck-house floor with a vast deal more of alacrity than they could ever have exhibited in life. At last it came to my having to feed Aunt Damaris and Florence; which I managed by popping bits, at the end of a fork, first into my darling's mouth and then into her aunt's; and need I tell you, boys, which mouth had the choicest morsels? It was a funny meal, and they both laughed heartily as they bobbed at my fork, which I flourished with great grace and ease; but the crabs were rare eating, and when the tea or supper or whatever you like to call it was finished, Aunt Damaris declared that she hadn't enjoyed such a meal since she had left England. I looked into the mate's cabin to see how the poor fellow was getting on; I had given orders to the cook to boil him some broth out of a piece of goat's flesh; and this, along with a crab, he told me he had eaten and greatly relished; but when I looked at him I could not but feel that food had nothing to do with *his* illness; not a Lord Mayor's banquet, brought every day to his bedside, was likely to do him any good; his malady was only too surely some wasting disease, some failure or decay of a vital organ, not to be mended by the royalest fare that an emperor's cook could turn out. Yet I found him in pretty good spirits. He said it did him good to hear the brig humming through the water, and added: 'She's tender down to a certain point; but after that the canvas would have to blow out of the bolt-ropes before she'd bury herself by another half-strake.'

'Well, I mean to give her no rest,' said I. 'Had we had time, maybe I'd have shipped more ballast at St. Paul's, for it'll be all sagging with her, I'm afraid, on a bowline. But I'm too thankful to God to feel her under me to grumble at any point in her. D'ye know,' I asked him, 'if there's a razor aboard? I feel I look like a ring-faced monkey for the want of a shave.'

'I think you'll find one in the captain's cabin,' said he: 'I don't know what the poor man had. I'm sure; but there'll be more conveniences for you there than I am able to offer you, sir,' and he just lifted his head to look, with a wan, apologetic, sorrowful smile, at his chest.

I left him, and asked Aunt Damaris's leave to enter her cabin, explaining that I wanted to seek for a razor there, and also remove the late skipper's nautical instruments, charts, etc., to my own berth.

'The idea of asking *my* permission!' she exclaimed. 'Mr. Jack, you can be very sarcastic sometimes. I shall not soon forget your explanation for having chosen the name of Egerton.'

However, she was smiling as she said this, so I laughed out, seeing she meant nothing by it.

'Jack,' said Florence, 'can you conceive how Aunt Damaris and I are to manage for *clothes*? If the voyage is to last for two months—and you said that was quite probable—what *are* we to do for dresses?'

'Why, my darling,' I answered, 'what I said, was that it might take this brig all of two months, and perhaps three, ay, and even four, to reach Australia. But that's supposing we have to perform the voyage in her—an idea much too improbable to disturb us. We're sure to meet with ships good enough to transfer ourselves to, and it'll be strange if there are not women aboard who will help you to wearing apparel enough to last you till you reach Australia.'

'But how long is that likely to be, Mr. Seymour?' cried Aunt Damaris. 'Remember, please, that Florence and I are absolutely without a change of—er—a change of—'

'I wish I could tell for certain,' said I; 'we may be out of this brig in a week—we may be out of her to-morrow. Who can guess? But, my pet,' said I, turning to her, 'don't worry yourself over such a trifle as a change of dress. Think of the fearful island of St. Paul's already being miles astern of us, and that we are fairly under way for a port that will terminate all the abominable anxieties and sufferings you and Miss Hawke have undergone.'

'Women can't help thinking of dress, even in shipwreck,' said she, laughing. 'It's not nice to feel a fright even in the midst of disaster. How *I* look, I'm sure I cannot imagine. I am thankful there is no looking-glass in the brig; I know I should peep at it, and I'd much rather not find out how I appear.'

'How you appear!' cried I. 'Be easy, love. Appear as you will, you can't help being lovely.'

It made her as red as a rose to hear me, for she knew by the passion in my voice, and by my eyes, that I was speaking Heaven's truth, as it seemed to me.

'And how do *I* look, I wonder?' exclaimed Aunt Damaris; 'fearful, no doubt;' and her old face bobbed up at me with a peck, as much as to say: 'No nonsense, young man.'

'I'll say no more than this,' I answered, 'and I mean no compliment; you look ten years younger than you did when I first saw you at Gravesend. Think what you will of the sea, it has served you well, Miss Hawke; and your friends will tell you so when you get ashore, believe me.'

Was I humbugging her? not I. I meant to put her into a good-humor with herself, and if a fellow can please an old lady in that way he ought to do it. Pleased she was, and I saw her adjust her starboard sausage curl, as she glanced at Florence with a smile.

'But,' continued I, 'I hope there *is* a looking-glass in the brig—even a bit of one—for if I don't shave soon, my darling, I shall have to keep clear of you out of self-respect.'

'You certainly would look better for a shave, Jack' said she, 'whiskers *might* become you when you get them; but a tooth-brush, dear, or what looks like the tips of a line of them—'

I bolted into their cabin, and was followed by a peal of laughter from both of them. I found a sailor's chest and a small locker; the chest was half-full of clothes, and nothing else; but in the locker, besides an old sextant, I found a brush and comb, a hand-glass with a loop attached to the handle, three razors in cases, several pieces of soap wrapped in paper, along with some boxes of cigars, a handful of wooden pipes, a housewife well stocked, and a score of other odds and ends. In a corner was a bagful of charts, and on a small shelf over the door a chronometer and a case of instruments for navigating purposes, such as a sector, a plane-scale, and the like. These articles I conveyed to my cabin, and then, emerging with the hand-glass, I flourished it before Florence's face. She recoiled and shut her eyes, and put up her hands, and cried: 'No, I daren't look.' So I gave the glass to Aunt Damaris, who immediately fell to exploring her own countenance, saying, well, on the whole she did not look so dreadful as she had feared. Whereupon Florence said she did not mind taking just one peep. But it was now time for me to bundle on deck; so, taking the brush and comb, I sallied forth, called to the cook and bade him get them washed and carried aft to the ladies, and then joined the bo'sun. It was 7 o'clock; the sun was still fairly high in the west, and away about three points on the port bow was Amsterdam Island, distant about thirteen or fourteen miles. It lay green as spring grass against the sky, with the large red-dish-colored clouds sailing over it into the east; astern, nothing was to be seen, nor on either hand. The sun was rising and falling among the lumps of vapor which were coming up in shoals out of the western sea, and whenever he hove himself clear of one of those bodies the fast reddening light would come down in a perfect rain, gushing into the hollows of the seas till they looked as deep again as they were, and filling out the eastern seaboard in a manner to make the water-line there appear leagues farther off than the western horizon; and a fine sight it was, I can tell you, to watch the effect of this lifting sunshine, when a cloud drove up to the orb, and seemed with its shadow to shoulder up the gush of light clear off the surface of the ocean into the level sky, where it vanished, presently to reappear in our wake and come with a leap along the snow of it and the breaking brows of the surges till the brig would be bathed in the pink glory; while, scuppers under, and the wind flashing fair into her topsails with a screech as it split upon the rigging, and a moan as it swept out of the canvas, she drove, jumping and groaning through it, dragging her bed of foam forward with her as she went.

Heading as we were, first the southern, then the western, and then the northern portions of the island would be opened and compassed by us; and I might be as sure as fate that if there were people there they would spy us coming. The flying light threw the land up clear and keen in the field of the telescope—that was a very good glass, though its coat was deplorably ragged and old—and I'd see the green of plenty of vegetation there, and an island very much more cheerful and habitable to behold than the hollow, sterile, crater rock on which we had passed the night. But look as I would there was no appearance of a signal of any kind to be seen on the south and east side of it. I swept the rugged line and foreground of the water with extraordinary care, but nothing resembling a boat was to be discerned; though I reckoned that, if any of the Strathmore's people had found an asylum there, they'd make haste to put off and intercept us when they saw the brig heading dead for the island. I went into the cabin to overhaul the charts, and, coming across one of the Indian Ocean with the prickings of half a dozen voyages upon it, I examined it to make sure of my navigation, for I had no desire to plump the Sarah Jane on a sunken reef hereabouts, and finding the coast clear, returned on deck, and stood conversing with the bo'sun while the sun sank lower and lower and the island on the lee bow grew bigger and greener with the flush of the setting daylight upon it, and a coming and going of its emerald hues as the cloud shadows swept over it. Yet the sun was still above the water when the land was little more than three miles distant, plain in the glass as a man's hand to his eyes, and the surt ringing it with the gleam of ivory.

'I'm afraid we shall find nobody there, bo'sun,' said I.

'I'm afraid so too, sir,' he replied, letting the glass fall from his face; 'there's plenty of stuff to make a smoke with, anyhow; there's plenty of clear top for a signal, too, and we're close enough to see a pocket-handkerchief if such a thing was hoisted. If none of our people are there, where *are* they, sir?'

'Picked up, or drowned, or still knocking about—one of the three certainly; for we know they're not on St. Paul's Island, and I'm afraid they're not here either.'

Aunt Damaris and Florence joined us to look, and forward you could see all the men hanging over the rail, staring at the land.

Fathom by fathom we drove along, the old brig splashing savagely as she dives, and trembling under the pressure that was urging her bowsprit pointed to give the island a clear berth, and the sun, whose lower limb was close to the water, was nearly abeam; fixedly I watched the land as it slowly drew aft past the starboard cathead on to abaft the fore rigging, and so sternward, until the red glory, creeping up and up the green slopes till the topmost heights looked like burning gold, suddenly melted upon the blue of the sky and burned in the clouds beyond; and when I withdrew my eye from the glass the sun was gone, and the greenish seas were rolling up to us out of a horizon that was like a whirlpool of crimson haze.

'Wheel there!' I sung out, 'let her go off. Bo'sun, get the yards braced in for rounding into the eastward.'

This was done, and the wind by being brought aft gave us a more comfortable deck. Courtesying and rolling as only an old wagon in ballast knows how, the Sarah Jane swept along a northeast course, sending the island veering away on the starboard quarter, and opening its northern and eastern sides, which were fast taking an olive-colored loom in the deepening twilight.

'Stand by to heave to,' said I to the bo'sun, 'we must give our hopes a chance. But I very much fear it'll be idle waiting.'

There was still a little twilight left when, with her main-topgallant-sail stowed and the mainsail and foresail hauled up, the brig's helm was put down and she was hove to with her head to the northward. There was a flare-tin aboard and from time to time we burned this over the rail, the turpentine making a great glare that illuminated the brig from the eyes to the taffrail; and the light was so strong that every time it burned itself out it left our sight useless for a spell, and the night seemed as black as thunder, till the white foam showed again, and we saw the island like a lump of indigo down to leeward. But no response was made, no light was shown, and no boat appeared, though the merest phantom of one must have been spied, had it been there, by the eager eyes which hung over the bulwarks gazing, and searching and probing the swarming waters with a sight intensified by eagerness to succor those who had been our shipmates.

'There's no chance, sir,' said the bo'sun to me, after we had been hove to two hours, during which the brig had drifted away to the eastward, till the dark lump of land hung fair on the weather quarter. 'If there's e'er a soul on that island our flare must have been visible to 'em; they'd know the meaning, and if they had a boat they'd launch it; failing that, they'd kindle a fire to let us know they were there. Mr. Seymour, ye'll find that rock is desolate as St. Paul's.'

'That's what I think. But what do the men say? If they choose we'll 'bout ship and stand off and on till daylight.'

The watch off duty had gone below, which was a pretty good hint that they had abandoned all idea of there being anybody to save off that Island. Shilling called to the men who were on deck, and put the case to them. Should Mr. Seymour stand off and on during the night and wait for the morning breeze before sailing away? They answered, that they were quite willing, but they were afraid it would be of no use. 'If,' said one of them, 'if the people fetched that island on the same day as we fetched St. Paul's, they'd have their boats, for the weather was too fine to do 'em hurt. If they had their boats and was there, they'd have ratched off for us whenever they see the brig hauling into view. No boat appearin', and no sign havin' been made aboard Hamsterdam Island, my notion is, sir, that it would do no good by stoppin'.

All agreeing in this view, I bade them once again look over the side and have a good stare round; and then, having lingered another half hour, I ordered the helm to be shifted and the yards braced square for an easterly course. It gave one a kind of wrench to go away, though it afterward turned out to be the right thing to do. I stood peering into the dimness astern till the bit of land that had gloomed out black and magnified even at the distance of three miles faded into the general darkness, and where it had been you saw nothing but a star or two, low down, with the white water of our wake rushing out that way. The strong wind blew fair over the stern, and every inch of canvas the brig carried that would draw to a following breeze was set, and the old tub wallowed and splashed along her dark course. 'This time last night?' thought I; and I looked aloft at the darksome spaces of canvas, as shadowy as clouds, over the deck-houses, and then away into the southwest blackness, where the island of St. Paul's stood, and where the night lay darkest, and where the eye found no other light than the pallid glimmer of froth creaming with a long, simmering sound out of the inky running coils of water, and pictured the hut there, and the women under the boat's sail, and myself crouched in the corner near the door. To think of *that*, to feel that week after week of such nights as this might have rolled over our heads without bringing us succor, was something, let me tell you, to force a wild shudder out of a man; and it was to get away from my own thoughts more than for any other reason that I walked into the deck-house, where the old lady and my pet were, and sat down to yarn with them a while by the light of the old swinging lamp that swung by a stanchion amidships of the structure.

CHAPTER XLVII.

RESCUED.

And now, boys, having come to this point, it's about time that I turned to and ran this story ashore; for, if you haven't had enough of the sea, *I have;* and I'm beginning to long for the sight of shops and streets and trees, just as you are, maybe, for the conclusion, to hear what the end of all this business was, and how my courtship finished; so the chief incidents of the next six days I'll give you in log-book form, making the journal more readable by dropping out the dates and the days' work and other items which swell out sea-diaries till they're little more than Greek to landsmen.

All that night the stormy westerly wind chased the Sarah Jane, with a middling run of sea, that helped the old bucket along bravely, and the log gave as much as six and a half knots. I was up, off and on, throughout the night, sometimes in the bo'sun's watch, sometimes in William Somers's, and always found both men alive and keeping a bright lookout, stamping one side of the deck, with a chap grinding at the wheel to meet the wild play of the frisky old wagon, the braces taut as the backstays, the wind shrilling out the swollen concavities, and the thunder of parted seas under the bows coming aft against the wind with a noise like the falling of a cataract, where water smites water and roars into foam.

But, when I came on deck next morning, I found the wind east-southeast, bleak as November in the Channel, a thick horizon, smoke-colored clouds rolling up, with a spitting of rain that was swept past the masts horizontally, and the brig easing down to her covering-board on the starboard tack, close-hauled, with single reefs in her topsails, and her foresail looking as if but a little more weight of wind was needed to make eyes in it. Oh, it was a dismal sight for a man to come on deck to look at; and it made lies of the charts, that set down the prevailing winds as westerly. You need only have glanced over the weather quarter, and seen the short, oily wake of the brig floating out to windward, to understand my feelings. Sailing! why, it was all leeway; and the road we had traversed last night we were hearkening back upon, driving the backward beam first, without an atom of help for it. I didn't mind this so much at first, and, indeed, put a good face upon it before Aunt Damaris and Florence, telling them that though, to be sure, we were not lying well up for Australia, our bows were more that way than our stern, and that there was no use in hoping for fair winds every day; but I got rather restless and anxious when next morning came and found the wind still blowing strong out of the east, the sky dirty, the horizon thick as mud, and the seas of a stormy green, as they slanted their curling ridges at the diving bows of the brig, and tumbled over her weather rail before the drifting hulk could wallow out of the trough.

After breakfast that morning I went into the mate's cabin to have a talk with him, but found him too ill for conversation. So, instead of doing what I intended—taking his judgment as to whether it would be wise to make a fair wind of it by heading north, and seeking a fair breeze in parallels nearer the equator, for a 'run to the Cape of Good Hope instead of trying for Australia—I attempted nothing more than a little sympathy, feeling all the while even the uselessness of *that*, for if ever a man lay dying, he did; you saw the shadow of what was coming on his hollow face, and his eyes had a dim, yearning look, as though for some time they had been striving to stare past the present, peering for a glimpse of the new kind of light, whose dawn had not yet come. He had tasted no food, and I asked him if there was anything aboard the brig he could fancy; if there was anything, indeed, that could be done for him. He answered no, he had no appetite; if there were a doctor or medicine, he felt he might be brought back to life; he'd get some ease, he was sure; and he only needed to be free of pain, he thought, to get better; but, as it was, he told me he had no hope; and the tears came into the eyes of the lonely, dying sailor as he said it.

The ladies knew that the mate was a sick man, but how bad he was I had not told them, nor could they imagine, for they had never set eyes upon him, nor did they once tell me that they had heard him groaning or complaining in his cabin. When I left him this time I found Florence and Aunt Damaris at the table, looking over a book or two they had come across in the captain's berth.

'I wish this weather would clear up,' said the old lady. 'The air's too raw and damp for the deck, and yet it's quite intolerable to be confined to this house, and tumbled about in it as if one were in a barrel, rolling down hill.'

'It'll make home the sweeter when we get there,' I replied.

'I shall be glad to sight a ship,' she continued. 'It will not matter which way she steers. Nothing that we can encounter is likely to be more slow in her speed and violent in her movements than this brig.'

'How is the poor mate?' asked Florence, with a glance to let me know that she was sorry that her aunt was in a bothersome mood. The darling could see I was worried myself, and asked the question to take the old lady off me.

'If he lives through the night,' I answered, 'it's as much as I dare hope for him.'

They both started. 'Is he dying? is he so near death as that?' exclaimed Florence, in a low voice, full of awe and pity.

'Poor, poor fellow!' cried Aunt Damaris.

'And he's lying alone there!' said Florence, 'without anybody to attend to him. Oh, Jack, you must let me go to him. It must be dreadful to die with people talking near you, and yet nobody coming to say a prayer, to utter a word, to show that you are thought of.'

I told her to go by all means, saying that her presence would be sure to comfort the poor fellow, who might talk to her, and speak to her of his home, with more freedom than he would venture upon with one of his own sex; and I stepped out on deck, being, indeed, too much troubled about the weather, and the thoughts it put into my head, to dwell upon the mate, though in easier times the dying man would not, I think, have lacked plenty of sympathy and constant attention at my hands.

Shilling had charge of the watch, and I found him near the wheel, staring aloft at the topsails, dark with the damp, with a look now and then at the weather horizon, that was near to us with the thickness, while the brig labored distressingly amid the hollows which came yawning out of the smother, green as bottle glass, and laced with froth that the wind now and again would blow over the rail.

'This is the second day of this beastly easterly wind,' said I to him. 'I wouldn't call it serious now, if I could reckon upon a fair wind to-morrow, or even the next, to hold for a month or two, or to drive us into the arms of a ship. But it has an abominably settled look.'

'Yes, it do look settled, certainly,' he replied, slewing his moist face round the sea; 'whoever says westerly breezes prewail in these waters hasn't got much of the truth in him.'

'I'd laugh at such weather,' I continued, 'if this brig could sail; but what's to be done with an old cask like this, that, even with the weather-braces checked, drifts to leeward like the smoke from her galley chimney, and almost as fast?'

'There's no use talking of ratching with her, that's plain,' replied the bo'sun.

'We have barely provisions for six weeks. The ladies have no clothes but what they stand up in, and we Strathmore's men are pretty nearly as badly off. My fancy is to shift the helm, and stretch away north and risk it; but, think of the wind, after we had made a few hundred miles of westering, coming on to blow again from the westward! It's a fearful job to be in a vessel that won't go to windward. If we don't mind our eye, bo'sun, we may be knocking about in the Sarah Jane four months hence, and making a worse shipwreck of it than had we stuck to St. Paul's.'

He tried to encourage me by saying there was no fear of that; but I was in low spirits, and unable to take a hopeful view; why, even my former assured belief that we should sight a ship long before our provisions ran out, and be succored by her, became but a dim, faint thing, when I looked into the thickness, and reflected upon the huge surface of water we were upon, how little of it, even in clear weather, we were able to see, and how ships passing us at a distance of six or seven leagues would be of no more account to us than were the great Indian Ocean unnavigated by any other fabric than ours. I remained on deck all the morning, trusting that the weather might clear, and enable me to get a view of the sun, and praying for a shift of wind and a visible horizon, with a mind worried by thinking whether we ought to hold on as we were or to up helm and bear away northwest. At half-past 12 I went into the cabin for a bit of dinner, and there found Florence and her aunt fresh from the dying man, both of them looking terribly dejected.

'We have been praying with him, and reading from a Bible he has,' said Florence. 'He is very grateful. Oh, Jack, he is dying fast. He fainted twice after telling us, eagerly, about his mother, and how, when he is gone, she will have no one to support her. He knows he is dying, and oh,' she cried, with her colorless face full of a kind of horror, 'it's dreadful to notice how he recoils from the idea of being thrown into the sea.'

'He'll not know—he'll not know it, Florence, when it happens,' exclaimed the old lady. 'When I die I'd rather be buried in the sea than in a churchyard.'

'Yes,' I said, 'the ocean's a sweeter and purer cemetery than an acre of ground full of worms; and a hammock's a better coffin than an oak box. But, for God's sake, don't let us talk of death and horrors.' And I started off at a rattle upon whatever cheerful thing came into my head, sitting down beside Florence, and fondling and soothing her till I had brought something like color in her face again. But, preserve us! the situation was a wild one for those two to be in—a dying man hard by to emphasize their miserable condition, a crazy old brig staggering God knows where, through weather fit to make a man hang himself, jumping, rolling, heaving, wobbling in a manner to fill every bone in one's body with an aching as sharp as rheumatism; amidships of the biggest track of ocean in the world, with six weeks' provisions aboard for a voyage that might last as many months, if ever it found a termination. I tell you, old Alphonso Hawke's palace at Clifton rose up in my mind when I glanced round the Sarah Jane's deck-house, and contrasted the beggar's meal of a crab or two and a piece of coarse salt junk, that went sprawling about the table, with the dinner Hawke had given us in his dining-room, when I was looking love into my pet's eyes over the beaded rim of a champagne glass. And still my darling was with me! That was something, after all, to put sunshine into the brig, though the sky lay like a lead-colored sheet over the vessel; this old ocean, that I was cursing and loathing for the foul winds of it, had given her to me; the beautiful flower was in my heart, mine and nobody's else, come what might, whether we fetched England or Australia, or whether we sank in each other's arms to the bottom of the sea; and though this *last* fancy was not over-inspiriting, the rest was all so true that it put a sort of gayety into me, and, with my arm round Florence's waist, letting the old lady think my design was to support her, I chattered myself into something like good spirits, and had them both smiling soon, and even laughing, though under their breath, for the sense of the dying man behind the bulkhead there dropped like a hush upon them. He died that night. It was as black as pitch on deck, the seas breaking over the brig, and the wind thick with salt water and squalls of rain; and I went into the deck-house to take the shelter of it for a spell, and, when there, thought I'd step in to the mate's berth, and see how he did. I knocked, but Aunt Damaris said: 'He'll be too feeble to answer you; he could scarcely speak to Florence when she was with him, about two hours ago.' So I opened the door and went in, and sped him, by the light of the cabin-lamp, lying along the deck, with his face down and his arms stretched out. I fancied he was in a faint; that he had wanted help, and got out of his bunk and fallen down for weakness, and swooned; till I looked close, and saw a sluggish black trickle on the plank his mouth was against; and then, turning him gently, I knew by the first feel of him that he was stone-dead, for the rigidity of a corpse that's growing cold is a thing not easily mistaken. God knows how he came to be on the deck; there may have come to him a death-struggle that routed him over the edge of his bunk, or he had risen to summon help, being too feeble to shout for it; anyway, there he was, dead! so I raised him, finding him shockingly light, little more, indeed, than a skeleton, and put him into his bunk again; and then, just giving the news to Florence and her aunt as I stepped past, I told a couple of hands to lay aft with a hammock and needles and twine, and stitch the poor fellow up, and carry him away forward for the sailor's last toss when the morning came.

It hardly needed this thing to sadden me. Of all the nights that I had passed at sea none had ever found me so dejected, so anxious, so oppressed in mind, as that one. I was weak enough to imagine some dreadful ill was soon to befall us, and that the distress of my spirits was a presentiment of it. The truth is, I was heavily weighed down by the sense of my responsibility. Here was I, in sole charge of all the lives aboard this brig; and, as if that were not enough, one of them so infinitely precious to me that the value of it made a load of the obligation almost too heavy for a young fellow of twenty-five years old, and who for three years had scarcely set eyes on the sea, to stand up under. They say that the need of preserving the life of one dear to you puts nerve into you, and will give you a kind of preternatural strength when you want it. This may be true of novel heroes, but it's false if said of me. Why, if it hadn't been for Florence being with me—if I'd known she was safe at home—I'd have found our shipwreck, and what followed in the island and aboard the brig, little more than a trifling sea incident. No, it was the thoughts of her that kept me worrying. Oh, mates, it was true enough that I might forget her hardships and peril in the joy her presence gave me when I was in the cabin talking to her, fondling her, making her look at me, that I might see her heart shining in her beautiful eyes; but it was otherwise when, on that black evening, I'd stop to peer at her through a deck-house window, and then carry my gaze away to the motionless blackness overhead, in which the brig's spars were no more to be seen than had she been a dismasted hulk; and watch the jump of her, which you might have followed by noticing the dive of the black outline forward into the faint, glimmering swirl she hove up in yeast and snow; and listen to the wild raving of the wind aloft, and the rattling of spray, falling upon the decks like a thunder-shower; and think of the tall, light hull driving dead to leeward, as though she would have me understand that no favoring wind could blow to urge her forward, but that the fast adverse breeze that followed would settle her back to the old spot again, and so leave us nothing under heaven to hope for but the rescue from a passing ship. Yet, though my boding was the most reasonable thing in the world, I don't forgive myself for it; it was unsailorly; and I'll not resent your sneers, though I'll ask you to remember that I had passed through enough anxiety to strain my nerves cruelly taut, and that my having command of the brig forced more harassing thought into me than was likely to trouble the others, who looked to my brains to haul them clear of their jeopardy, and not to their own.

Next morning found the weather unchanged save that the wind was blowing a point more easterly. The sea had somewhat increased in height, and the brig was rolling with her decks full of water. I had the well sounded the moment I came on deck, but found the vessel staunch, which I accepted almost as a miracle, for she had been laboring heavily for many hours, and her creaking and groaning might have made any man believe that she was working all the oakum out of her. The haze brought the water-line within a mile of us. Somers was on deck, and he said to me: 'Most onlucky weather this, sir. That hiland o'