

## CHAPTER XLI

### HUMAN FLESH FOR BAIT

JANUARY 8. -- All night I remained by the side of the poor fellow's corpse, and several times Miss Herbey joined me in my mournful watch.

Before daylight dawned, the body was quite cold, and as I knew there must be no delay in throwing it overboard, I asked Curtis to assist me in the sad office. The body was frightfully emaciated, and I had every hope that it would not float.

As soon as it was quite light, taking every precaution that no one should see what we were about, Curtis and I proceeded to our melancholy task. We took a few articles from the lieutenant's pockets, which we purposed, if either of us should survive, to remit to his mother. But as we wrapped him in his tattered garments that would have to suffice for his winding sheet, I started back with a thrill of horror. The right foot had gone, leaving the leg a bleeding stump.

No doubt that, overcome by fatigue, I must have fallen asleep for an interval during the night, and some one had taken advantage of my slumber to mutilate the corpse. But who could have been guilty of so foul a deed? Curtis

looked around with anger flashing in his eye; but all seemed as usual, and the silence was only broken by a few groans of agony.

But there was no time to be lost; perhaps we were already observed, and more horrible scenes might be likely to occur. Curtis said a few short prayers, and we cast the body into the sea. It sank immediately.

"They are feeding the sharks well, and no mistake," said a voice behind me.

I turned round quickly, and found that it was Jynxstrop who had spoken.

As the boatswain now approached, I asked him whether he thought it possible that any of the wretched men could have taken the dead man's foot.

"Oh, yes, I dare say," he replied in a significant tone, "and perhaps they thought they were right."

"Right! what do you mean?" I exclaimed.

"Well, sir," he said coldly, "isn't it better to eat a dead man than a living one?"

I was at a loss to comprehend him, and, turning away, laid myself down at the end of the raft.

Toward eleven o'clock a most suspicious incident occurred. The boatswain, who had cast his lines early in the morning, caught three large cod, each more than thirty inches long, of the species which, when dried, is known by the name of stock-fish. Scarcely had he hauled them on board when the sailors made a dash at them, and it was with the utmost difficulty that Curtis, Falsten and myself could restore order, so that we might divide the fish into equal portions. Three cod were not much among fourteen starving persons, but, small as the quantity was, it was allotted in strictly equal shares. Most of us devoured the food raw, almost I might say, alive; only Curtis, Andre, and Miss Herbey having the patience to wait until their allowance had been boiled at a fire which they made with a few scraps of wood. For myself, I confess that I swallowed my portion of fish as it was -- raw and bleeding. M. Letourneur followed my example; the poor man devoured his food like a famished wolf, and it is only a wonder to me how, after his lengthened fast, he came to be alive at all.

The boatswain's delight at his success was excessive, and amounted almost to delirium. I went up to him, and en-

couraged him to repeat his attempt.

"Oh, yes," he said; "I'll try again. I'll try again."

"And why not try at once?" I asked.

"Not now," he said evasively; "the night is the best time for catching large fish. Besides, I must manage to get some bait, for we have been improvident enough not to save a single scrap."

"But you have succeeded once without bait; why may you not succeed again?"

"Oh, I had some very good bait last night," he said.

I stared at him in amazement. He steadily returned my gaze, but said nothing.

"Have you none left?" at last I asked.

"Yes!" he almost whispered, and left me without another word.

Our meal, meager as it had been, served to rally our shattered energies; our hopes were slightly raised; there was no

reason why the boatswain should not have the same good luck again.

One evidence of the degree to which our spirits were revived was that our minds were no longer fixed upon the miserable present and hopeless future, but we began to recall and discuss the past; and M. Letourneur, Andre, Mr. Falsten and I, held a long conversation with the captain about the various incidents of our eventful voyage, speaking of our lost companions, of the fire, or the stranding of the ship, of our sojourn on Ham Rock, of the springing of the leak, of our terrible voyage in the top-masts, of the construction of the raft, and of the storm. All these things seemed to have happened so long ago, and yet we were living still. Living, did I say? Ay, if such an existence as ours could be called a life, fourteen of us were living still. Who would be the next to go? We should then be thirteen.

"An unlucky number!" said Andre, with a mournful smile.

During the night the boatswain cast his lines from the stern of the raft, and, unwilling to trust them to anyone else, remained watching them himself. In the morning I went to ascertain what success had attended his patience. It was scarcely light, and with eager eyes he was peering down

into the water. He had neither seen nor heard me coming.

"Well, boatswain!" I said, touching him on the shoulder.

He turned round quickly.

"Those villainous sharks have eaten every morsel of my bait," he said, in a desponding voice.

"And you have no more left?" I asked.

"No more," he said. Then grasping my arm, he added,  
"and that only shows me that it is no good doing things by halves."

The truth flashed upon me at once, and I laid my hand upon his mouth. Poor Walter!