

## CHAPTER LII

### I DECIDE TO COMMIT SUICIDE

JANUARY 25. -- Last night was very misty, and for some unaccountable reason, one of the hottest that can be imagined. The atmosphere was really so stifling, that it seemed as if it only required a spark to set it alight. The raft was not only quite stationary, but did not even rise and fall with any motion of the waves.

During the night I tried to count how many there were now on board, but I was utterly unable to collect my ideas sufficiently to make the enumeration. Sometimes I counted ten, sometimes twelve, and although I knew that eleven, since Jynxstrop was dead, was the correct number, I could never bring my reckoning right. Of one thing I felt quite sure, and that was that the number would very soon be ten. I was convinced that I could myself last but very little longer. All the events and associations of my life passed rapidly through my brain. My country, my friends, and my family all appeared as it were in a vision, and seemed as though they had come to bid me a last farewell.

Toward morning I woke from my sleep, if the languid stupor into which I had fallen was worthy of that name. One fixed idea had taken possession of my brain -- I would

put an end to myself; and I felt a sort of pleasure as I gloated over the power that I had to terminate my sufferings. I told Curtis, with the utmost composure, of my intention, and he received the intelligence as calmly as it was delivered.

"Of course you will do as you please," he said; "for my own part, I shall not abandon my post. It is my duty to remain here; and unless death comes to carry me away, I shall stay where I am to the very last."

The dull gray fog still hung heavily over the ocean, but the sun was evidently shining above the mist, and would, in course of time, dispel the vapor. Toward seven o'clock I fancied I heard the cries of birds above my head. The sound was repeated three times, and as I went up to the captain to ask him about it, I heard him mutter to himself:

"Birds! Why, that looks as if land were not far off."

But although Curtis might still cling to the hope of reaching land, I knew not what it was to have one sanguine thought. For me there was neither continent nor island; the world was one fluid sphere, uniform, monotonous, as in the most primitive period of its formation. Nevertheless it must be owned that it was with a certain amount of im-

patience that I awaited the rising of the mist, for I was anxious to shake off the phantom fallacies that Curtis's words had suggested to my mind.

Not till eleven o'clock did the fog begin to break, and as it rolled in heavy folds along the surface of the water, I could every now and then catch glimpses of a clear blue sky beyond. Fierce sunbeams pierced the cloud-rifts, scorching and burning our bodies like red-hot iron; but it was only above our heads that there was any sunlight to condense the vapor; the horizon was still quite invisible. There was no wind, and for half an hour longer the fog hung heavily round the raft, while Curtis, leaning against the side, strove to penetrate the obscurity. At length the sun burst forth in full power, and, sweeping the surface of the ocean, dispelled the fog and left the horizon open to our eyes.

There, exactly as we had seen it for the last six weeks, was the circle that bounded sea and sky -- unbroken, definite, distinct as ever! Curtis gazed with intensest scrutiny, but did not speak a word. I pitied him sincerely, for he alone of us all felt that he had not the right to put an end to his misery. For myself, I had fully determined that if I lived till the following day, I would die by my own hand.

Whether my companions were still alive, I hardly cared to know; it seemed as though days had passed since I had

seen them.

Night drew on, but I could not sleep for a moment. Toward two o'clock in the morning my thirst was so intense that I was unable to suppress loud cries of agony. Was there nothing that would serve to quench the fire that was burning within me? What if, instead of drinking the blood of others, I were to drink my own? It would be all unavailing, I was well aware; but scarcely had the thought crossed my mind, than I proceeded to put it into execution. I unclasped my knife, and, stripping my arm, with a steady thrust I opened a small vein. The blood oozed out slowly, drop by drop, and as I eagerly swallowed the source of my very life, I felt that for a moment my torments were relieved. But only for a moment; all energy had failed my pulses, and almost immediately the blood had ceased to flow.

How long it seemed before the morning dawned! and when that morning came it brought another fog, heavy as before, that again shut out the horizon. The fog was hot as the burning steam that issues from a boiler. It was to be my last day upon earth, and I felt that I should like to press the hand of a friend before I died. Curtis was standing near, and crawling up to him, I took his hand in my own. He seemed to know that I was taking my farewell, and with one last lingering hope he endeavored to restrain

me. But all in vain; my mind was finally made up.

I should have liked to speak once again to M. Letourneur, Andre, and Miss Herbey, but my courage failed me. I knew that the young girl would read my resolution in my eyes, and that she would speak to me of duty, and of God, and of eternity, and I dared not meet her gaze; and I would not run the risk of being persuaded to wait until a lingering death should overtake me. I returned to the back of the raft, and after making several efforts, I managed to get on to my feet. I cast one long look at the pitiless ocean and the unbroken horizon; if a sail or the outline of a coast had broken on my view, I believe that I should only have deemed myself the victim of an illusion; but nothing of the kind appeared, and the sea was dreary as a desert.

It was ten o'clock in the morning. The pangs of hunger and the torments of thirst were racking me with redoubled vigor. All instinct of self-preservation had left me, and I felt that the hour had come when I must cease to suffer. Just as I was on the point of casting myself headlong into the sea, a voice, which I recognized as Dowlas's, broke upon my ear.

"Captain," he said, "we are going to draw lots."

Involuntarily I paused; I did not take my plunge, but returned to my place upon the raft.