

## CHAPTER LIII

### WE DECIDE TO DRAW LOTS

JANUARY 26. -- All heard and understood the proposition; in fact it had been in contemplation for several days, but no one had ventured to put the idea into words. However, it was done now; lots were to be drawn, and to each would be assigned his share of the body of the one ordained by fate to be the victim. For my own part, I profess that I was quite resigned for the lot to fall upon myself. I thought I heard Andre Letourneur beg for an exception to be made in favor of Miss Herbey; but the sailors raised a murmur of dissent. As there were eleven of us on board, there were ten chances to one in each one's favor -- a proportion which would be diminished if Miss Herbey were excluded; so that the young lady was forced to take her chance among the rest.

It was then half-past ten, and the boatswain, who had been roused from his lethargy by what the carpenter had said, insisted that the drawing should take place immediately. There was no reason for delaying the fatal lottery. There was not one of us that clung in the least to life; and we knew that, at the worst, whoever should be doomed to die, would only precede the rest by a few days, or even hours. All that we desired was just once to slake our raging thirst and moderate our gnawing hunger.

How all the names found their way to the bottom of a hat I cannot tell. Very likely Falsten wrote them upon a leaf torn from his memorandum-book. But be that as it may, the eleven names were there, and it was unanimously agreed that the last name drawn should be the victim.

But who would draw the names? There was hesitation for a moment; then "I will," said a voice behind me. Turning round, I beheld M. Letourneur standing with outstretched hand, and with his long white hair falling over his thin livid face that was almost sublime in its calmness. I divined at once the reason of this voluntary offer; I knew that it was the father's devotion in self-sacrifice that led him to undertake the office.

"As soon as you please," said the boatswain.

M. Letourneur proceeded to draw out the folded strips of paper, one by one, and, after reading out loud the name upon it, handed it to its owner.

The first name called was that of Burke, who uttered a cry of delight; then followed Flaypole and the boatswain. What his name really was I never could exactly learn. Then came Falsten, Curtis, Sandon. More than half had

now been called, and my name had not yet been drawn. I calculated my remaining chance; it was still four to one in my favor.

M. Letourneur continued his painful task. Since Burke's first exclamation of joy not a sound had escaped our lips, but all were listening in breathless silence. The seventh name was Miss Herbey's, but the young girl heard it without a start. Then came mine, yes, mine! and the ninth was that of Letourneur.

"Which one?" asked the boatswain.

"Andre," said M. Letourneur.

With one cry Andre fell back senseless. Only two names now remained in the hat -- those of Dowlas and M. Letourneur himself.

"Go on!" almost roared the carpenter, surveying his partner in peril as though he could devour him. M. Letourneur almost had a smile upon his lips, as he drew forth the last paper but one, and with a firm, unfaltering voice, marvelous for his age, unfolded it slowly, and read the name of Dowlas. The carpenter gave a yell of relief as he heard the word.

M. Letourneur took the last bit of paper from the hat, and, without looking at it, tore it to pieces. But, unperceived by all but myself, one little fragment flew into a corner of the raft. I crawled toward it and picked it up. On one side of it was written Andr--; the rest of the word was torn away. M. Letourneur saw what I had done, and, rushing toward me, snatched the paper from my hands, and flung it into the sea.