

## CHAPTER LIV

### MISS HERBEY PLEADS FOR ONE DAY MORE

JANUARY 26. -- I understood it all; the devoted father having nothing more to give, had given his life for his son.

M. Letourneur was no longer a human being in the eyes of the famished creatures who were now yearning to see him sacrificed to their cravings. At the very sight of the victim thus provided, all the tortures of hunger returned with redoubled violence. With lips distended, and teeth displayed, they waited like a herd of carnivora until they could attack their prey with brutal voracity; it seemed almost doubtful whether they would not fall upon him while still alive. It seemed impossible that any appeal to their humanity could, at such a moment, have any weight; nevertheless, the appeal was made, and, incredible as it may seem, prevailed.

Just as the boatswain was about to act the part of butcher, and Dowlas stood, hatchet in hand, ready to complete the barbarous work, Miss Herbey advanced, or rather crawled, toward them.

"My friends," she pleaded, "will you not wait just one more day? If no land or ship is in sight to-morrow, then

I suppose our poor companion must become your victim. But allow him one more day; in the name of mercy I entreat, I implore you."

My heart bounded as she made her pitiful appeal. It seemed to me as though the noble girl had spoken with an inspiration on her lips, and I fancied that, perhaps, in supernatural vision she had viewed the coast or the ship of which she spoke; and one more day was not much to us who had already suffered so long, and endured so much.

Curtis and Falsten agreed with me, and we all united to support Miss Herbey's merciful petition. The sailors did not utter a murmur, and the boatswain in a smothered voice said:

"Very well, we will wait till daybreak to-morrow," and threw down his hatchet.

To-morrow, then, unless land or a sail appear, the horrible sacrifice will be accomplished. Stifling their sufferings by a strenuous effort, all returned to their places. The sailors crouched beneath the sails, caring nothing about scanning the ocean. Food was in store for them to-morrow, and that was enough for them.

As soon as Andre Letourneur came to his senses, his first thought was for his father, and I saw him count the passengers on the raft. He looked puzzled; when he lost consciousness there had been only two names left in the hat, those of his father and the carpenter; and yet M. Letourneur and Dowlas were both there still. Miss Herbey went up to him and told him quietly that the drawing of the lots had not yet been finished. Andre asked no further question, but took his father's hand. M. Letourneur's countenance was calm and serene; he seemed to be conscious of nothing except that the life of his son was spared, and as the two sat conversing in an undertone at the back of the raft, their whole existence seemed bound up in each other.

Meantime, I could not disabuse my mind of the impression caused by Miss Herbey's intervention. Something told me that help was near at hand, and that we were approaching the termination of our suspense and misery; the chimeras that were floating through my brain resolved themselves into realities, so that nothing appeared to me more certain than that either land or sail, be they miles away, would be discovered somewhere to leeward.

I imparted my convictions to M. Letourneur and his son. Andre was as sanguine as myself; poor boy! he little thinks what a loss there is in store for him to-morrow. His father

listened gravely to all we said, and whatever he might think in his own mind, he did not give us any discouragement; Heaven, he said, he was sure would still spare the survivors of the Chancellor, and then he lavished on his son caresses which he deemed to be his last.

Some time afterward, when I was alone with him, M. Letourneur whispered in my ear:

"Mr. Kazallon, I commend my boy to your care, and mark you, he must never know --"

His voice was choked with tears, and he could not finish his sentence.

But I was full of hope, and, without a moment's intermission, I kept my eyes fixed upon the unbroken horizon. Curtis, Miss Herbey, Falsten, and even the boatswain, were also eagerly scanning the broad expanse of the sea.

Night has come on; but I have still a profound conviction that through the darkness some ship will approach, and that at daybreak our raft will be observed.