

kin ride out a storm like this will be, in a dingey. Ef I don't miss it, it'll worry some other vessels, too. I never seen a worse sky.'

Even as he spoke a dash of rain pattered on them, and a fierce gust caused them to clutch the railing. In an instant more, with a howl and crash, flare of lightning and bellow of thunder, the tempest enfolded Rebecca Shoals.

'Andy'll never get here to-night, I reckon,' observed Jack, when he and Helen were safely within the protecting walls. 'He went to the Key at noon, you know.'

'That's so,' assented Helen. 'He's in the same fix I am.'

'With Matt sick that'll leave me to ten' light alone. I've set up many the time, though, an' this spell won't hurt me. How d'ye feel, Matt?' stepping to the bunk of the old keeper.

'Not very spry, Jack. Wher's Helen?'

'Here I am, father.'

'You mustn't try to go in sech a gale, lass. Hez Andy come yet?'

'No, sir,' answered the girl.

'Then you'll hev to ten' light, Jack, fer I'm not able to be about.'

'All right, Matt. Reckon I'd better set 'er goin' now; it's gettin' so dark,' responded Fordyce, awkwardly adjusting a pillow. 'You're in good han's, an' I'm mighty glad Helen's here. I'll climb up now. Ef I'm wanted you know how to git me, Helen.'

In an hour the rain had slackened, but the wind continued to blow, lashing the tower with great waves. All chances of Helen returning to Garden Key that night had passed, and with it any latent hope that Andy, the other keeper, would appear. Jack was forced to stick to his post in reach of the lamp, and below Helen nursed her father. A little after midnight Jack was startled by Helen opening the door.

'Oh, Jack,' she said, 'can't you come down, just for a moment. Father's in a kind of stupor, an' I can't rouse him. An' the medicine's all gone, too.'

Fordyce leaped to the stairway, and in a second was bending anxiously over the bunk.

'Matt!' he called.

Welsh moved uneasily. The voice seemed to bring to him glimmering consciousness. Helen stroked his forehead. 'What!' he answered, drowsily, and lapsed again into his lethargy.

'Is the med'cine used up, sure?' inquired Jack of the girl.

'Every drop. The bottle was knocked over an' a lot spilt. What can we do, Jack? We must stimulate him some way.'

'We'll rub him,' said the man. 'Mebbe that'll help.'

Their efforts were in vain. Matthew refused to respond.

'He needs something to brace him up, that's what he needs,' observed Jack.

'The medicine was for that,' explained Helen. 'Oh, dear!'

Matthew's breathing was growing laboured. Outside moaned and shrieked the gale. Suddenly it sank to a ghostly whisper. The wheezing of the sick man was now painfully apparent.

'By George, I'm not goin' to let ol' Matt Welsh die like a dog, while I kin help it!' spoke Fordyce. 'Kin' you ten' light, sweet-heart?'

'Me ten' light? Of course I can! But what do you mean? You arn't—'

'Yes, I be, I'm going to take your father to Garden Key, wher' Doc Morgan kin git at 'im. It's a shame to hev 'im die this way, when he hez a chance o' livin'.'

'Jack, you mustn't. You'd both be drowned. It's suicide.'

'Looky here, Helen. Don't you stop me. I've been bidin' my time to prove I'm not a coward. He called me that, an' I've jes' been waitin' an' waitin' ever since. Whether or no he knows what I do, I'll take 'im to Garden Key this very night. I'll do it because he called me a coward, and 'cause he's your father, and hez been a good frien' to me.'

The girl clung to his neck. 'Jack, Jack,' she sobbed. 'I can't let you. I can't let you.'

'Lass,' he said gently, holding her tightly, 'you wouldn't hev me a coward would you? An' the wind's fell like everything, an' I kin make the trip, I know. You'll see me comin' back inside o' six hours to tell you Matt's safe an' 'bout well. See here, and he threw wide the door.'

The moon was shining fitfully between scudding clouds. The wind was still blowing briskly, and the huge waves rose from the base of the tower seemingly nearly to the platform. A wild night, and one not disposed to quiet the fears of the girl.

'It's 19 miles. 'Oh, Jack!' was all she said.

'Remember, he called me a coward, Helen.'

They closed the door and Welsh's low breathing drew Helen to the bunk. Something must be done to cause his blood to circulate or he would die before morning. Jack ran up the stairs and in a moment returned. He lifted his coat from the hook and put on his hat, pulling it snugly down.

'I've seen to the lamp,' he said. 'It's all right, an' I think it won't need touchin'. You understan' it, anyway. Now, I'm goin' to lower the boat, ef you'll bear a han' on the tackle. Git it into the water onct, to lu'ard here, an' the rest's fun, you see.'

'Are you really goin', Jack?' asked the girl, standing in front of him, her eyes brimming with unshed tears, but steadfast.

'That I be, lass,' was the resolute response.

She leaned forward and kissed him on the brow, tenderly, reverently, as though consecrating him for some noble work.

'You're a brave man,' she said, simply. 'My lover, how proud I am of you. I'll expect you back to-morrow, sure, dear. I'll look for you. So hold in mind, an' God willin' I'll see you again—my Jack.'

'I'll come, never fear,' he answered, gathering her into his arms. 'Ther's never a gale I couldn't beat fer the sake o' sech a welcome waitin' fer me. Now let's hurry. He, indicating Matthew, 'can't las' much longer. B'lieve the bes' thing to do is to put 'im in the boat fir'st, afore we lower away. I dunno ez I kin carry him down, with the wind blowin' an' the footin' slip'ry.'

The unconscious Matthew was wrapped in a blanket, and borne out on to the platform. The boat was swung as nearly as possible, under him, and while Helen held it steady, Fordyce, exercising all his strength, placed in the craft the body of the keeper.

Fortunately, the wind was dying to a moderate velocity. The storm was over. The waves, however, were running high. The man and the girl lowered the boat, until on the lanky water it tossed hither and thither, straining at the tackle.

Now it was a question of but a few moments ere it would fill. Time was of the utmost value. Not wasting an instant Jack clambered down the ladder, shouting a good-bye as he descended.

He caught the dingey, as it hung poised beneath him, on the crest of the wave, and tumbled in. For a brief glimpse Helen saw him. Then the tackle dangled idly in the wind, and boat, lover, and father had disappeared.

Jack found the dingey had about a foot of water in the bottom. He did not attempt to attend to this, or to the poor old keeper, who was doubled between two seats, knocked into a heap by the waves. His sole endeavours were directed to riding the seas that threatened to engulf the craft, until, in the space of twenty minutes, he had become accustomed to the onslaught of the billows.

Before casting off the tackle he had stepped the mast and shaken loose the sail, thankful that it was double-reefed as when last used. The wind blew quartering, flinging the mist and spray against the man's cheek, as he sat peering ahead. The boat rushed into the hollows, and rising on the white-capped summits plunged furiously into phosphorescent depths. More sail would bury the boat; less leeway would swamp her. All Jack could do was to take a turn with the sheet around a cleat, and staring into the darkness trust to his strong arms and his skill to avert, by steering, the tremendous force of the waves.

Welsh's cramped attitude pained Fordyce. Taking advantage of successive favourable moments he tore out one of the seats so that the patient could lie full length. He shoved him toward the bows, the better to trim the boat, and bolstered him against another seat, thus elevating his head out of danger of suffocation by incoming water. These movements were hazardous, but necessary.

The dingey drove on and on through the night, ever toward Garden Key. Despite the efforts of Fordyce masses of water would slap into the boat. Incessant bailing was essential to safety. His arms were tired. His wrists ached. The tension on his nerves was terrible. The dingey seemed to be darting along with prodigious speed, but he knew better. He knew progress was slow, and that the peril never lessened.

An error in judgment and his life would be grimly snuffed out. He was alone, with Death close watching him. Demons swooped past him, blinding him, twitching at his hair and garments. But, when about to yield to weariness and let the worst come, he thought of Helen awaiting his return, and across the waste the eye of the light at Rebecca Shoals blazed encouragement. Helen was there. His blood warmed at the token, and he shut his teeth with determination.

Suddenly, to his surprise, Matthew spoke:

'Helen! Jack! Here! What's the matter?'

'Hello, Matt. Don't be scart. It's me, Jack, an' I'm takin' you to Garden Key.'

The sick man half-raised himself.

'Garden Key! Great God, what d'ye mean? In this storm?'

'Storm's past now, Matt. You've been sleepin', and we was afeared you were gittin' worse, so I'm a-takin' you to Doc Morgan. The med'cine's run out, you see. Guess the water's woke yo' up. It comes in an' I can't help it.'

'Why, Jack, lad,' said Matthew, hoarsely, 'we'll never git ther. This is the foothardest thing ever I heard of. You'd a better lemme die, ruther'n kill us both. Wher's Helen?'

'She's tendin' light. Don't you worry. We'll git ther. We've got to go on now. We're mos' ther, you know. You res' easy. I kin handle the boat like a top.'

As if to mock his assertion an angry flood swirled over the gunwale, pouring in triumphantly.

'Few more like that,' muttered Fordyce, 'an' our goose is cooked.'

For a short time silence ensued. Fordyce thought Matthew had sunk into his stupor. But no.

'Jack!' feebly.

'Yes, sir.'

'You mus' put me over, Jack. I can't las' much longer, I feel it—I'm goin' fas'. 'Twouldn't be drowndin', you see, and 'twould lighten the boat. Don't wait, Jack.'

'Put you over, you say. No, siree, when you go, I go. You jes' sleep, an' I'll hev you at Garden Key mighty quick now.'

Again a wave swept over. Fordyce bailed desperately. On his left ear fell these words, dropped one by one from lifeless lips:

'Jack—I—I—I—was—wrong—lad.'

'God bless you fer sayin' that, Matt,' said Jack.

There was no reply, and he devoted his energies to clearing the dingey of as much water as he could while keeping his course. The sea was rougher, indicating shoals, and his danger increased.

Afar, oh, so far, he beheld the Fort Jefferson light on Garden Key. Would they live to reach the haven? Was his companion already dead? Would he follow in a moment? The exertions were telling on him. His arms were numb. He was chilled to the bone, stiff from his constrained position and his wrenched muscles. The water in the boat was gaining on him. But he must not, could not, fail of his purpose. Yet he felt he would die happy, if he die he should—Matthew acknowledged he was not a coward.

An hour passed. The walls of the fort were visible, for the sky was becoming gray. Five more miles, God! Could he hold out? For—three—a long, weary bailing, bailing all the time. Two miles. He could see the wall where he and Helen had so often strolled. And Helen was waiting for him, like a brave, true lass, and he must not disappoint her. If he could but make a turn in