

experienced. The thought of my own peril was all but swallowed up in my anxiety for her whom I loved so well. Alice in danger of what I knew not—Alice on board this ill-omened vessel, under the guidance of such an unprincipled dare-devil as Captain Gregg! I could now fathom this man's eagerness to prevent me from embarking. Doubtless, some caprice of gratitude towards myself had made him reluctant that I should be involved in the general doom, whatever it might be, of the unlucky passengers on board the *Proserpine*.

Yet, with the weight of this apprehension upon me, I found it hard indeed to decide upon the proper course to pursue. Should I go frankly to Mr. Harman, apprise him of the character of his captain, state the whole train of suspicious circumstances, and demand an immediate inquiry into Gregg's conduct? There was every chance that the old merchant would misconstrue my motives, and refuse to credit my assertions. Would it be better to assemble the more able-bodied passengers, reveal all I knew, and if necessary, take forcible possession of the ship? Had I been alone, I might have adopted this alternative, hazardous as it was; but I shrank from the idea of exposing Alice to unnecessary risk, and I well knew that if I denounced Gregg openly, bloodshed, in that wild region, was certain to follow, to whichever side victory might incline. The perfidious captain of the steamer was brave enough, and the desperadoes whom he had purposely mingled among the crew would of course sustain their leader, while I could not say what auxiliaries might at any moment paddle forth from creek or bay to co-operate in the plunder of the richly laden vessel. The Mississippi pirates had been sorely thinned by the rough-and-ready justice of Regulators' Courts, but there was still existing in the decaying townships of the Cotton States a residuum of scoundrelism ripe for any violence that promised great gains quickly made.

To speak to Gregg would possibly be the wisest plan. The man's heart was not, as I fancied, entirely hardened, and I thought that I had that morning observed signs of his being secretly averse to the evil work in which he was engaged. If his blood were once up, he would probably cast all scruples of conscience to the winds, but it was perhaps not wholly hopeless to appeal quietly to his better feelings. And yet should I fail, I should very likely have precipitated the very misfortunes against which I sought to guard. What was that dark figure standing beside the helmsman?—Gregg himself; and surely this must be the chief-engineer again coming from the neighborhood of his fires to confer with the steamer's commander. Half unconsciously, I drew near, and my ears caught the last words, spoken imperatively, and as if to put an end to the discussion, with which Gregg dismissed his subordinate: "Old woman's nonsense, Mr. Beale, I tell you. Crack on!"

'It's off my shoulders anyhow,' muttered the engineer beneath his clenched teeth, as he passed me; and the furious force with which the huge engines drove us along, making the old craft reel and tremble at every giant pulsation, furnished an eloquent commentary to his words. Gregg now stooped, and gave some orders to the helmsman, speaking in a low voice. 'Ay, ay, ay,' answered the man. Gregg turned, and I caught a glimpse of his pale, fearfully resolute face. His mouth looked as firmly set as if the lips had been of steel, and there was a wicked gleam in his eyes. So intent was he in looking out into the night, that he did not observe my approach until I was quite close to him. Then