

squire. Let her rip! And with this proverbial expression of social philosophy, he turned away. On we went, while night crept in upon us, and from the swampy shore and mud flats of the river there arose a dense white mist, that mingled with the long gray Spanish moss which hung in fantastic pendants, like the hoary beards and streaming hair of an army of giants, from the primeval trees of the Louisiana shore. The long sad cry of the whip-poor-will was quickly answered by the whoop of the owl and the whirring wings of the bats, while the shrill and mournful howls of wild animals arose at intervals from the tangled forest. There seemed to be an awakening, as day died out, of the birds and beasts that only leave their lairs under the shadow of night; but of man and his works nothing were visible except the white gleam of the embankment that kept out the waters from the cultivated land. I was glad when the wan moon, not yet half full, threw her silvery gleam upon the sullen river, above which the mist hung like a giant veil.

Seldom before, in a life that had not been wholly unadventurous, had I felt the same dull sense of a shapeless peril near at hand, against which it behooved me to guard. And yet what risk could there be, unless from the reckless hurry with which the fire was heaped with fuel, and the steamer forced along; and I had been too often in Mississippi boats madly racing in the struggle to be the first at some given point of arrival, to apprehend much danger on that score, if only no collision should occur. Captain Gregg, who still avoided me, was unremitting in the discharge of his duty, and the *Proserpine* dashed on under careful steering, unharmed by the floating timber that here and there specked the surface of the flood, or the more formidable obstruction of the sunken trees, firmly imbedded in the mud of the shallows, and whose jagged and spear-like heads protruding from the water have proved fatal to many a craft.

'Hist! just stop where you are, master, for a minit,' said a deep voice, lowered to a hoarse whisper, in my ear: 'don't pay attention now, but keep still, and I'll be back in a jiffy. The skipper has eyes like a cat's.'

The voice and the words alike sounded strangely to me, but two or three of the firemen and deck-hands were passing near me at the time, staggering under their burdens of fuel to replenish the greedy fires below, and one of them must have been the speaker. Mechanically complying with the advice of my unknown friend, I remained quietly where I was, feigning unconsciousness, and leaning on the bulwark, continued to watch the evening stars peeping with their tremulous lustre through the shimmering haze, and the cold gleam of the white moonlight on the turbid river. The captain, who had been standing at no great distance from me, soon moved away, and in another minute a stealthy figure came creeping among the bales and hencoops, as a lizard crawls among the stones, and stood at my side. By the dim light I could see that he was one of the crew, a wiry little man, with crisp grey hair curling under his tattered straw hat, but who had an unmistakable air of seamanhood about him, in spite of his dirty jacket of butternut-colored homespun. Deck-hands of a Mississippi steamer are usually a miscellaneous collection of waifs and strays, Germans and Irish predominating, and there was something singular in finding a genuine sailor in such a position.

'All right, sir. Mr. Alfred—my eyes are better nor yours, old as I am'—said the intruder, very cautiously; 'or else, which is likely, your face is less altered than that of Sam Kentish'—