

# A Night of Fog.

[TAKEN FROM THE MAHOGANY TREE.]

We have been out about a week. It was Thursday, the third, I think, of September, and a queer day it was from the first. You know, probably, how seldom it is that dense sea-fog is met with in deep soundings. Well, that day, in mid ocean, the fog was as heavy as any I ever saw on the banks of Newfoundland. There was not a cloud. The disk of the sun rose red and dull in the morning, and so it remained all day, except when shreds of thicker mist would blot it for the moment from sight. There was not a breath of wind, and the sea was quiet, except for the long, glassy swell from the east.

The air was warm, and so heavy that it seemed hard to breathe. Now and then, however, when the swift heel of the ship as she rolled brought us close to the surface of the rising wave, we would catch a gust of coolness from its dusky slope. The water seemed permeated with a keen unnatural cold. The negro firemen, hot from their work, drew it up by the bucketful and dashed it over their shining bodies, but the others shrunk from it, saying that it smelt of sulphur, and indeed there was about it a strange repellent odor. It was dull, too, in color, almost black, and the greenish bubbles of the broken swell rose heavily as through some foul, oily scum.

At noon the captain took an observation—such as he might in the constant wavering of the wide mist-wreaths that streamed fantastic, lead-colored, over sea and sky. He was standing on the bridge, and I joined him there. He said nothing, however, but went sullenly below to figure out our position. He seemed to feel none of the gloomy influence of the weather; indeed, he paid not the slightest heed to it, except that, as he went below, he told me gruffly to see that all was snug against the gale that might be gathering behind the ever-increasing swell.

The first mate was confined to his berth

by an injury to his leg—the result of a fall in a hatchway—and I was left in full charge of the ship. The captain did not reappear on deck till it was nearly night. Then I went up to him and asked him for instructions.

“We are in lat. 31.5 north, long. 40.6 west,” he answered. “You will see that our course is held sou’west by south. Keep a careful watch on the weather, and put a man on the bow-deck for look-out. The fog may be thicker to-night.”

Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he walked aft. The strange sense of restless anticipation that oppressed the others seemed to leave him untouched. Yet he was the only man on board who was indifferent, except the stolid negro firemen, and even on their faces, when they came on deck, I could see a growing expression of anxiety, and the constant glancing of the whites of their eyes showed a nervous unrest that steadily increased as the strange day settled into a murky and horrible twilight.

The crew crowded together on the forward hatch, trying to pierce the leaden volumes of sullen cloud ahead, or glancing fearfully at the blood-red mist behind, through which the huge sun burned like a misshapen ball of infernal fire.

I went down and stood by them. As the darkness deepened the mist seemed to take actual form, and to settle in fine oily ashes on hands and face, and the cold reek from the sea came dank and clammy as the touch of a corpse. As the red ball of the sun faded completely from sight, there came a sense of loneliness, of desertion, of abandonment to the unknown powers and perils of the darkness. Hardly a loud word was spoken. Men whispered anxiously, and trod softly, as if fearing to break the spell of the unnatural sea-silence.

Even the captain seemed to begin to feel