
JOHN
OXENHAM
MAID
OF THE MIST

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Maid of the Mist

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"That's out of the question, Job."

"Is it now?… Well, I'm sorry. Wus hopin' mebbe a word of advice from a man what's old enough to be your feyther, an's known you since day you was born, might be o' some use to ye. We'd like you fain well for Master, both o' th' Hall an' th' Hunt."

"You're a good old chap, Job, and so's your father, but you'll both be doing me a favour if you'll stop any talk of that kind."

"No manner o' use?"

"No use at all."

"Well, I'm main sorry. An' so's feyther, I can tell ye."

Mrs. Carew was sitting in a large chintz-covered armchair before the fire in her bedroom, when he was taken up to her by Mollie, who favoured him with her own diagnosis as they mounted the stairs.

"She's that bad again. Can't sleep and off her food. Ain't had hardly anything all day or yes'day. Just sits 'fore th' fire and mopes from morn'n till night. 'Taint natural for sure, for him 'at's gone weren't one to cry for, that's cert'n.… No, she don't complain of any pain or anything. Just sits and mopes and cries on the quiet 's if her heart was broke. Sure she'd more cause to cry before he was took than what she has now."

When he entered the room he did not at first see her, so sunk down was she in the depths of the great ear-flapped chair.

She made no attempt to rise and greet him. When he stood beside her and quietly expressed his regret at finding her no better, she covered her face with her hands and sobbed convulsively.

She looked little more than a girl, slight and frail and forlorn, as she crouched there with hidden face, and he was truly sorry for her. It was impossible for him to keep the sympathy he felt entirely out of his voice.

"What can I do for you, Mrs. Carew?" he asked quietly, and the forlorn figure shook again but made no response.

"You are doing yourself harm with all this," he said gently again. "And there is really no occasion for it, that I can see."

Her silent extremity of grief—her utter discomfiture was pitiful to look upon. It touched him profoundly, for he penetrated the meaning of it. She was overwhelmed with the knowledge of the sacrifice he had made for her—and with pity for herself.

All he could do was to wait quietly till the feeling, roused afresh by his presence, had spent itself.

"Oh, I did not know," she whispered at last, through the shielding hands. "I did not know you would do that.… You have ruined yourself.… You should have let them hang me."

And there and then, on the spur of the moment, he leaped up a height which he had not even sighted a second before.

He had, by the sacrifice of his prospects, saved her from the legal consequences of her act. That was irrevocably past and done with, and he must pay the price. But she was

paying a double due—remorse for what she herself had done, bitter sorrow at the ruinous price he had paid for her safety.

He had saved her life. Why not save her the rest?—her peace of mind, all her possibilities of future happiness.

In any case it would make no difference to him. For her it might mean all the difference between darkness and light for the rest of her life. And she looked pitifully helpless and hopeless as she lay there sobbing convulsively in the big chair.

He saw the possibility in a flash and gripped it.

"Hang you? Why on earth should anyone want to hang you?" he asked, with all the natural surprise he could put into it.

"You know,"—in a scared whisper. "Because I got him the poison——"

"Come, come now! Let us have no more of that. I was hoping a good night's rest would have ridded you of that bad dream."

"Dream?" and she looked up at him wildly. "Ah, if I could only believe it was a dream!" and she shook her head forlornly.

"Why, of course it was a dream. You were over-wrought with it all, and your mind took the bit in its teeth and ran away with you. What you've got to do now is to try to forget all about it."

"Forget!"

"How I came to make such a mistake I cannot imagine, but when I got home I saw at once that there was an extra dose gone out of my strychnine bottle instead of out of the distilled water, and that explained it at once."

"*You*?… *You* made the mistake?" she looked up at him again, eagerly, with warped face and knitted brows, and a wavering flutter of hope in her eyes…. "You are only saying it to comfort me."

"I'm trying to show you how foolish it is to allow yourself to be ridden by this strange notion you've got into your head."

"Strange notion?… Did he not beg me to get him that stuff he used for the rats? And did I not get it for him? And he took it. And then——" she shivered at the remembrance of what followed when her husband took the draught.

"All in that horrible dream when your mind was running away with you——"

"And did you not come and tell me they would hang me unless I kept my mouth shut? And I lay all that dreadful night with the rope round my neck——"

"All in your dream. I'm sorry. It must have been terribly real to you."

"A dream?" and she stared wistfully into the fire, hex hands clasping and unclasping nervously. "If I could believe it!"

"You must believe what I tell you, and forget all about it and recover yourself."

"And you?" she said after a pause.

"I shall be all right. Don't trouble your head about me."

"If I did not do it," she said, after another long silent gazing into the fire, "then there would be no need for you to hate me——"

"No need whatever—all part of that stupid dream."

"And… sometime perhaps… you would think better of me… as you used to do. Oh—Wulfrey!… "

If it had all happened as he had almost persuaded her to believe, he might have fallen into his own pit.

For, under the stress of her emotions—the wild hope of the possibility of relief from the horror that had been weighing her down—the letting in of this thread of sunshine into the blackness of her despair—the sudden joy of the thought that it was not she who needed Wulfrey's forgiveness, but he hers;—the shadows and the years fell from her, and she was more like the Elinor Baynard he had once been in love with than he had seen her since the day she married Pasley Carew.

"We must not think of any such things," he said quickly, but not unkindly. He was very sorry for her, but he was no longer in love with her. "At present all we've got to think about is getting you quite yourself again. I will send you up some medicine—if you won't be afraid to take it——"

"Oh, Wulfrey!… " with all the reproach she could put into it, and anxiously, "You will come again soon?"

"If you get on well perhaps. If you don't I shall turn you over to Dr. Newman," and he left her.

"She ain't agoing to die, Doctor?" asked Mollie, as she waylaid him.

"No, Mollie. She's going to get better."

"Ah, I knew it'd do her good if you came to see her," said the astute handmaid with an approving look.

"Get her to eat and feed her up. She's been letting herself run down."

"Ah, she'll eat now maybe, if so be 's you've given her a bit of an appetite," said Mollie hopefully; and Dr. Wulfrey went away home.

XI

But even two patients hardly make a practice, and though from the stolid commoner folk calls still came for 'th' Doctor's' services, upon the better classes a sudden blessing of unusual health appeared to have fallen, or else ——

Dr. Newman bought a horse about this time, and, though he did not as yet cut much of a figure on horseback, it enabled him to get about as he had never had occasion to do since he settled in the village, and it seemed as though, in his case as in others, practice would in time make him passable.

Wulfrey watched the course of events quietly and with a certain equanimity. His mind was quite made up to go

abroad, but he would not go till he was satisfied that that was the only course left to him.

Everybody he met was as friendly as ever, the men especially, but sickness was a rare thing with them at any time, and their women-folk seemed to be getting along very well, for the time being without medical assistance, so far at all events as Dr. Wulfrey Dale was concerned.

Mrs. Carew was better. Whatever she really believed as to the actual facts of her husband's death, she apparently accepted Dale's statement, to the great relief of her mind and consequent benefit to her health. She sent for the Doctor as often as she reasonably could, and sometimes without any better reason than her desire to see him. Until at last he told her she was perfectly well and he would come no more unless there were actual need.

"But there is actual need, Wulfrey. It does me good to see you. If you don't come I shall fall into a low state again."

"If you do I shall know it is simple perversity and I'll send Dr. Newman to you."

"Mollie would never let him in."

Which was likely enough, for Mollie's mind was quite made up as to the only right and proper course for matters to take under all the present circumstances.

The March winds brought on a mild epidemic of influenza.

Dr. Newman and his new horse were ostentatiously busy. Wulfrey saw that he had waited long enough, and that now it was time to go. No one could accuse him of running

away. It was his practice that had found its legs and walked over to Dr. Newman.

He made his arrangements at once and by no means downcastly. The hanging-on had been trying. It was new life to be up and doing, with a new world somewhere in front to be discovered and conquered.

He packed his trunks, gave Mr. Truscott, the lawyer, instructions to dispose of his house and everything in it except certain specified articles and pictures, arranged with his bankers at Chester to collect and re-invest his dividends, drew out a couple of hundred pounds to go on with, told them he was going abroad and they might not hear from him for some time to come, and went round to say good-bye to Jim Barclay and Elinor Carew.

"Where are you going?" asked Barclay, when he heard he was off.

"Wherever the chase may lead," said Wulfrey, in better spirits than he had been for many a day. "I shall go first to the States and Canada and have a good look round. If any place lays hold of me I may settle down there."

"For good and all?"

"Possibly. Can't say till I see what it's like. I want you to take Graylock and Billyboy till I come back. You know all about them. There's no one else I'd care to leave 'em with and I don't care to sell them."

"They'll miss you, same as the rest of us."

"For a week or two, maybe. Dr. Newman is getting into things nicely, but you might give him a lesson or two in riding, Jim."

"—— him, I'd liefer break his back!" was Barclay's terse comment. "You'll let me know where you get to, Wulf, and maybe I'll take a run over to see you, if you really find it in your heart to settle out there. I'll bring the horses with me if you like."

"I'll let you know. Fine sporting country, I believe—bears, wolves, buffaloes, game of sorts."

"Well, good-bye and God bless you, my boy! Remember there'll always be one man in the old country that wants you. I'd sooner die than have that new man poking round me. I'll send for old Tom Tamplin, hanged if I don't."

Wulfrey rode on to the Hall.

"Going away, Wulf? Where to and for how long?" asked Elinor, anxious and troubled.

"That depends. I've not been up to the mark lately and a good long change will set me up."

"But you will come back?"

"I have really no plans made, except to get away for a time and see a bit of the outside world."

"I was hoping… you would stop and… sometime, perhaps… " and the small white hands clasped and unclasped nervously, as was her way when her mind was upset.

"The change I am sure will be good for me. And you are quite all right again. You are looking better than I've seen you for a long time past."

"I'm all right," she said drearily, "except that I have bad dreams now and again. I cannot be quite sure in my own mind——"

"Now, now!"—shaking a peremptory finger at her. "That is all past and done with. Bad dreams are forbidden, remember!"

"I can't help their coming. They come in spite of all my trying at times. And they are always the same. I see Pasley lying on the bed, raging and cursing, and ordering me to go and get him——"

"It's only a dream of a dream. I was hoping you had quite got the better of it. You must fight against it. Now I must run. Got a lot of things to do yet, and I'm off first thing in the morning. Good-bye, Elinor—and all happiness to you!"

BOOK II

NO MAN'S LAND

XII

Wulfrey Dale, as he strolled about the Liverpool docks and basins, felt very much like a schoolboy who had run away from home in search of the wide free life of the Rover of the Seas.

He had, however, one vast advantage over the runaway, in that he had money in his pocket and could pick and choose, and there was no angry master or troubled parent on his track to haul him back to bondage.

He had no slightest regrets in the matter. Under all the circumstances of the case, he said to himself, he could have done nothing else. Elinor, left to herself, would undoubtedly have paid with her life, either on the gallows or in a mad-house, and that was unthinkable. The inexorable Law would have taken no account of the true inwardness of the case. He had saved her because he understood, and because the alternatives had been too dreadful to think of.

As to the cost to himself—the long blue-green heave of the sea, out there beyond the point, made little of that, changed it indeed from one side of the account to the other, and presented it, not as a loss, but as very substantial gain.

Out beyond there lay the world, the vast unknown, the larger life; and the windy blue sky streaked with long-drawn wisps of feathery white cloud, and the tumbling green waves with their crisp white caps, and the screaming gulls in their glorious free flight, all tugged at his heart and called him to the quest.

And these cumbered quays, with their heaps of merchandise, and the jerking ropes and squeaking pulley-blocks that piled them higher and higher every moment—the swaying masts up above and busy decks down below—the strange foreign smells and flavour of it all—the rough tarry-breeks hanging about and spitting jovially in the intervals of uncouth talk—all these were but a foretaste of the great change, and he savoured them all with vastest enjoyment.

He inspected, from a distance, the great clippers that did the voyage to New York in twenty to twenty-five days, stately and disciplined, in the very look of them, as ships of the line almost.

There were ships loading and unloading for and from nearly every port in the world. It was like being at the centre of a mighty spider's web whose arms and filaments reached out to the extremest ends of the earth. He had never felt so free in his life before.

He was in no pressing hurry to settle on either his port or his ship, but in any case it would not be on one of those great packet-boats he would go. His fancy ran rather to something smaller, something more intimate in itself and less likely to be crowded with passengers whose acquaintance he had no desire to make.

He wandered further among the smaller craft, with a relish in the search that was essentially a part of the new life. He developed quite a discriminating taste in ships, though it was only by chatting with the old salts who lounged about the quay-walls that he learned to distinguish a ship from a barque and a brig from a schooner. His preferences were based purely on appearances. The sea-faring qualities of the various craft were beyond him.

But here and there, one and another would attract him by reason of its looks, and he would return again and again to compare them with still later discoveries, saying to himself, "Yes, that would do first-rate now, if she should happen to be going my way. We'll see presently."

He came, in time, upon a brig loading in one of these outer basins, and even to his untutored eye she was a

picture—so graceful her lines, so tapering her masts, so trim and taut the whole look of her.

"Where does she go to?" he asked of an old sailor-man, who was sitting on a cask, chewing his quid like an old cow and spitting meditatively at intervals.

"Bawst'n, 'Merica, 's where she's bound this v'y'ge, Mister, an' ef she did it in twenty days I shouldn' be a bit s'prised, not a bit, I shouldn'."

"Good-looking boat! What does she carry?"

"Miskellaneous cargo. Bit o' everything, as you might say."

"And when does she sail?"'

"Fust tide, I reck'n, ef so be's her crew a'n't been ganged. Finished loading not ha'f an hour ago she did."

"Does she take any passengers?"

"Couldn' say. Passenger boats is mostly down yonder."

"I know, but I like the look of this one better than the big ones."

"Well, you c'n ask aboard."

"Yes? How can I get on board?"

"Why, down that there ladder," and Wulfrey, following the direction of a ponderous roll of the old fellow's head and a squirt of tobacco-juice, came upon some iron rungs let into a straight up-and-down groove in the face of the quay-wall. By going down on his hands and knees, and making careful play with his feet, he managed at last to get on to this

apology for a ladder and succeeded in climbing down it, over the side of the ship on to its deck.

The deck, dirty as it was with the work of loading, felt springy to his unaccustomed feet. It was the first ship's deck he had ever trodden. The very feel of it was exhilarating. It was like setting foot on the bridge that led to the new life.

As he looked about him—at the neatly-coiled ropes, the rope-handled buckets, the blue water-casks lashed to the deck below one of the masts, the masts themselves, massive below but tapering up into the sky like fishing-rods, the mazy network of rigging, four little brass carronades and the ship's bell, all polished to the nines and shining like gold—the worries and troubles of the last few months fell from him like a ragged garment. Elinor Carew, and Croome, and Jim Barclay, and even Graylock and Billyboy, the parting with whom had been as sore a wrench as any, all seemed very far away, things of the past, shadowy in presence of these stimulating realities of the new life.

He walked aft along the deck towards a door under the raised poop, and at the sound of his coming a man came out of the door and said, "Hello!" and stood and stared at him out of a pair of very deep-set, sombre black eyes.

He was a tall, well-built fellow of about Wulfrey's own age, black-haired, black-bearded and moustached, and of a somewhat saturnine countenance. His face and neck were the colour of dark mahogany with much sun and weather. He wore small gold rings in his ears, and Wulfrey set him down for a foreigner—a Spaniard, he thought, or perhaps an Italian.

"I was told you were sailing tomorrow for Boston," said Wulfrey. "I came to ask if you take passengers."

The man's black brows lifted a trifle and he took stock of Wulfrey while he considered the question. Then he said, "Ay? well, we do and we don't," and Wulfrey rearranged his ideas as to his nationality and decided that he was either Scotch or North of Ireland, though he did not look either one or the Other.

"That perhaps means that you might."

"Et's for the auld man to say——"

"The Captain?"

"Ay, Cap'n Bain."

"Where could I see him?"

"He's up in the toon."

"If you'll tell me where to find him I'll go after him."

The other seemed to turn this over in his mind, and then said, "Ye'd best see him here. He'll mebbe no be long."

"Then I'll wait. What time do you expect to clear out?"

"We'll know when the old man comes."

"Perhaps you would let me see the rooms, while I'm waiting."

The dark man turned slowly and went down three steps into the small main cabin. His leisurely manner suggested no more than a willingness not to be disobliging.

It was a fair-sized room, with a grated skylight overhead, portholes at the sides, seats and lockers below them, and a table with wooden forms to sit on. At the far end were two more doors.

"Cap'n's bunk and mine," said his guide, with a roll of the head towards the left-hand door, and opened the other for Wulfrey to look in at the narrow passage off which opened two small sleeping-rooms.

"You are then——?" asked Wulfrey.

"Mate."

"You're Scotch, aren't you? I took you at first sight for a foreigner."

"I'm frae the Islands…. Some folks hold there's mixed blood in some of us since the times when the Spaniards were wrecked there. Mebbe! I d'n know."

"And Captain Bain? He's Scotch too, I judge, by his name."

"Ay, he's Scotch—Glesca."

"If he'll take me as passenger I'll be glad. This would suit me uncommonly well."

"Ay, well. He'll say when he comes," and whenever his black eyes rested on Wulfrey they seemed to be questioning what it could be that made him wish to travel on a trading-brig rather than on a passenger-liner.

However, he asked no questions but pulled out a black clay pipe, and Wulfrey pulled out his own and anticipated the other's search for tobacco by handing him his pouch.

They had sat silently smoking for but a few minutes when a heavy foot was heard on the deck outside, and there came a gruff call for "Macro!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" and the doorway darkened with the short burly figure of a man whose words preceded him, "Tom Crimp'll have 'em all here by ten o'clock an' we'll—— Wha the deevil's this?"

"Wants to go passenger to Boston," explained the mate, and left Wulfrey to his own negotiations.

"If you're open to take a passenger, Captain Bain, I've fallen in love with the looks of your ship."

"What for d'ye no want to go in a passenger-ship? We're no a passenger-ship," and the Captain eyed him suspiciously.

"Just that I dislike travelling with a crowd, I've been looking round for some days and your ship pleases me better than any I've seen."

"Where are you from, and what's your name and rating!"

"I'm from Cheshire. Name, Wulfrey Dale. Rating, Doctor."

"An' what for are ye wanting to go to Boston!"

"I'm going out to look round. I may settle out there if I find any place I like."

"Are ye in trouble? Poisoned ony one? Resurrectionist, mebbe?"

"Neither one nor the other. I've no work here. I'm going to look for some over there."

"Can ye pay?"

"Of course. I'm not asking you to take me out of charity."

"That's a guid thing."

"How much shall we say? And when do you sail?"

"Et'll be twenty guineas, ped in advance, an' ef ye want ony victuals beyant what the ship provides, which is or'nary ship's fare same as me and the mate eats, ye'll provide 'em yourself."

"Understood! And you sail——"

"To-night's flood, ef the men get aboard all safe. They're promised me for ten o'clock."

"I'll pay you now and go up for my things."

"An' whaur may they be?"

"At Cotton's, in Castle Street."

"Aweel! Juist keep a quiet tongue in your heid, Doctor, as to the ship ye're sailing on. The 'Grassadoo' doesna tak passengers, ye ken, an' I dinna want it talked aboot."

"I understand. I've only got a box and a bag, but I'll have to get a man to carry them."

"Ay—weel!" and after a moment's consideration, "You wait at Cotton's an' we'll send Jock Steele, the carpenter, up for them at eight o'clock. Ye can coach or truck 'em as far as he says and carry 'em between you the rest."

So Wulfrey paid down his twenty guineas, and Captain Bain stowed them away in his trouser pocket, and buttoned

it up carefully, with a dry, "Donal' Bain's word's his only recip*ee*. You be here before ten o'clock and the 'Grassadoo' 'll be waiting for you."

"That's all right, Captain," said Wulfrey. "And I'm much obliged to you for stretching a point and taking me."

"It's me that's doing it, ye understand, not the owners. That's why."

XIII

The 'Grace-à-Dieu' justified Wulfrey's inexperienced choice. She was an excellent sea-boat, fast, and as dry as could be expected, seeing that she was chock full to the hatches, as Jock Steele informed him, while they carried down his baggage.

But after his first four hours on board his personal interest in her character and performance lapsed for three full days. He had stood leaning over the side watching the lights of Liverpool as they dropped away astern, and then those of the Cheshire and North Welsh coasts, and felt that now indeed he had cut loose from the past and was in for a great adventure.

It gave, him a curious, mixed feeling of depression and elation. He felt at once homeless and endowed with the freedom of the universe. He had burned his boats, he said confidently to himself, and was going forth to begin a new life, to conquer a new world. And he set his teeth and hung on to the heaving bulwark with grim determination.

But the sense of elation and width of outlook dwindled with the sinking lights. The feeling of homelessness and helplessness grew steadily upon him. He had taken the precaution of stowing away a good meal before he set foot on board, and he lived on it for three days.

He had never been bodily sick in his life before, but sick as he now was he was not too far gone to note the wretched peculiarity of his sensations, and to muse upon them and the ridiculousness of the provision he had made, at the Captain's suggestion, to supplement the usual cabin fare.

He could not imagine himself ever eating again, as he lay there in his heaving bunk, with nothing to distract his mind from the unhappy vacuums above and below but the heavy tread of feet overhead at times, and the ceaseless rush and thrash of the waves a few inches from his ear, and the grinning face of the cabin-boy who came in at intervals to ask if he would like anything yet.

But by degrees his head ceased to swim if he lifted it an inch off the pillow. By further degrees he found himself crouching up and clinging like a cat while he gazed unsteadily out of the tiny round porthole at the tumbling green and white water outside. Still further determination got him somehow into his clothes, and he dared to feel hungry and empty without nausea. Then he crawled out to the deck, feeling like a soiled rag. But the brisk south-west wind cleaned and braced him, and presently he nibbled a biscuit and found himself as hungry as a starving dog.

After that he very soon found his sea-legs, and by the fourth day he was a new man, eating ravenously to make up for lost time, and keenly interested in all about him.

So far they had had favourable weather and made good way. But Captain Bain was a fervent believer in the inevitability of equinoctials, and prophesied gales ahead, and the worse for being overdue.

Wulfrey learned, from one and another, chatting at meals with the Captain or Sheumaish Macro, one or other of whom was generally on deck, or with Jock Steele the carpenter, who also acted as boatswain, that the 'Grace-à-Dieu' was French-built which, according to Steele, accounted for the fineness of her lines.

"We build stouter but we cannot touch them for cut. She's as pretty a little ship as ever I set eyes on and floats like a gull," was the character Steele gave her. And he should know, as he'd made four voyages in her since their owners in Glasgow bought her out of the Prize Court, and she'd never given them any undue trouble even in the very worst of weather.

The crew, again according to Steele, were a very mixed lot, a few good seamen, the rest just lubbers out of the crimp house.

With Captain Bain and Sheumaish Macro, the mate, he got on well enough, but found both by nature very self-contained and manifesting no inclination for more than the necessary civilities of the situation.

"And why should they?" he said to himself. "I'm an outsider and they know nothing more about me than I've told them myself. Another fifteen or twenty days and we part and are not likely ever to meet again."

He made one discovery about them, however, which disquieted him somewhat. They were both heavy drinkers, but they usually so arranged matters, by taking their full

bouts at different times, as not to bring the ship into serious peril.

Wulfrey's eyes were opened to it by the fact of his not being able to sleep one night. After tossing and tumbling in his bunk for a couple of hours, and finding sleep as far off as ever, he dressed again sufficiently to go on deck for a blow. As he passed through the cabin he found Captain Bain there with his head sunk on his arms on the table, and, fearing he might be ill, he went up to him. But he needed no medical skill to tell him what was the matter. The old man was as drunk as a lord and breathing like an apoplectic hog. So he eased his neck gear and left him to sleep it off.

Macro was on deck in charge of the ship. Wulfrey simply told him he had been unable to sleep, but made no mention of the Captain's condition. And the mate said,

"Ay, we're just getting into thick of Gulf Stream and it tells on one."

Another night he found Steele in charge, and on the growl at the length of his watch, and gathered from him that both Captain and mate had on this occasion been indulging in a bit drink and were snoring in their bunks.

He could only hope that Captain Bain's prognosticated equinoctials, which were now considerably overdue, would not come upon them when both their chiefs were incapacitated. And his only consolation was the thought that this was not an exceptional occurrence but probably their usual habit when well afloat, and that so far no disaster had befallen them.

So, day after day, they sped along west-south-west, making good way and sighting none but an occasional

distant sail. Then they ran into mists and clammy weather, and sometimes had a wind and drove along with the swirling fog or across it, and sometimes lay rocking idly and making no way at all.

Wulfrey gathered, from occasional words they let fall between themselves, and from their answers to his own questions, that this was all usual and to be expected. They were getting towards Newfoundland where the Northern currents met the Southern, hence the fog, and it was too early for icebergs, so there was no danger in pressing on whenever the wind permitted.

Their seventeenth day out was the dullest they had had, heavy and windless, with a shrouded sky and a close gray horizon and, to Wulfrey's thinking, a sense of something impending. It was as though Nature had gone into the sulks and was brooding gloomily over some grievance.

Captain Bain stripped the ship of her canvas, and sent down the topmasts and yards, and made all snug for anything that might turn up. All day and all night they lay wallowing in vast discomfort, and Wulfrey lost all relish for his food again.

"What do you make of it, Bo's'un?" he asked, as he clawed his way up to Steele on the after deck, where he was temporarily in charge again.

"Someth'n's comin', sir," said Steele portentously, "but what it is beats me, unless it's one o' them e-quy-noctials the skipper's bin looking for."

In the night the fog closed down on them as thick as cotton wool; and, without a breath of wind, the long seas came rolling in upon them out of the thick white bank on one side and out into the thick white bank on the other, till

their scuppers dipped deep and worked backwards, shooting up long hissing white jets over the deck, and making everything wet and uncomfortable. Every single joint and timber in the ship seemed to creak and groan as if in pain, and Wulfrey, as he listened in the dark to the strident jerkings and grindings and general complainings of the gear, and pictured the wild sweeps and swoops of the masts away up in the fog there, wondered how long it could all stand the strain, and how soon it would come clattering down on top of them. Once, when a bigger roll than usual flung him against the mainmast and he clung to it for a moment's safety, the rending groans that came up through it from the depths below sent a creepy chill down his spine. It sounded so terribly as though the very heart of the ship were coming up by the roots.

Sleep was out of the question. His cabin was unbearable. Its dolorous creakings seemed to threaten collapse and burial at any moment. If they had to go down he would sooner be drowned in the open than like a rat in its hole. And so he had crawled up on deck to see what was towards.

The only comfort he found—and that of a very mixed character—was in the sight of Captain Bain and the mate, sitting one on each side of the cabin table with their legs curled knowingly round its stout wooden supports, which were bolted to the floor, and which they used alternately as fender and anchor to the rolling of the ship.

They had made all possible provision against contingencies. They could do no more, and it was no good worrying, so now they sat smoking philosophically and drinking now and again from a bottle of rum which hung by the neck between them from a string attached to the beam above their heads.

Wulfrey stood the discomforts of the deck till he was chilled to the marrow, then he tumbled into the cabin, and annexed a third leg of the table and sat with the philosophers and waited events.

"It's hard on the ship, Captain," he said, by way of being companionable. But the Captain only grunted and deftly tipped some rum into his tin pannikin as the bottle swung towards him on its way towards the roof. And the mate looked at him wearily as much as to say, "Man! don't bother us with your babytalk," and it seemed to him that they had both got a fairly full cargo aboard.

However, he decided it was not for him to judge or condemn. They knew their own business better than he did. There was no wind, no way on the ship, and all they could do was to lie and wallow and wait for better times. And the fact that they took it so calmly reassured him somewhat.

The cabin was so full of fog and tobacco-smoke that the light from the swinging oil-lamp could barely penetrate beyond the table. It made a dull ghastly smudge of yellow light through which the bottle swung to and fro like an uncouth pendulum, and he sat and watched it. Now it was up above his head between him and the mate; now it was sweeping gracefully over the table; now it was up above the Captain, who reached out and tipped some more rum into his pannikin.

He watched it till it began to exert a mesmeric influence on, him and his head began to feel light and swimmy. He knew something about Mesmer and his experiments from his reading at home. He experienced a detached interest in his own condition and wondered vaguely if the bottle would succeed in putting him to sleep. He tried to keep his eyes

on it, but they kept wandering off to the Captain, on whom it had already done its business, though in a different way.

He was dead tired. It was, he reckoned, quite six-and-thirty hours since he had had any sleep. What time of night or morning it was he had no idea. This awful rolling and groaning and creaking seemed to have been going on for an incalculable time.

What with the heavy unwholesomeness of the atmosphere, and the monotonous swing of the bottle, and the lethargic impassivity of his companions, he fell at last into a condition of dull stupidity, which might have ended in sleep but for the necessity of alternately hanging on to and fending off the table, as the roll of the ship flung him away from it or at it. And how long this went on he never knew.

He was jerked back to life by a sudden clatter of feet overhead and a shout. Then he was flung bodily on to the table, and found himself lying over it and looking down at Captain Bain, who had tumbled backwards in a heap into a corner. The rum-bottle banged against the roof and rained its fragments down on him. The lamp leaned up at a preposterous angle and stopped there.

"We're done," thought Wulfrey dazedly, and became aware of fearsome sounds outside—a wild howling shriek as of all the fiends out of the pit—thunderous blows as of mighty hammers under which the little ship reeled and staggered—then grisly crackings and rendings and crashes on deck, mingled with the feeble shouts of men.

Then, shuddering and trembling, the ship slowly righted herself and Wulfrey breathed again. Outside, the howling shriek was as loud as ever, the banging and buffeting worse than before.