

at once I saw a way to elude a great deal of the danger. This was as simple as could be, yet never would have come home to a man unable to keep his wits about him.

Blurred and slurred as the whole sky was with twisted stuff and with yellowness, I saw that the whirling pillars of sand not only whirled but also travelled in one spiral only. They all came from the west, where lay the largest spread of sand-hills, and they danced away to the north-east first, and then away to south of east, shaping a round like a ship with her helm up, preserving their spiral from left to right as all waterspouts do on the north of the Line.

So when a column of sand came nigh to suck me up, or to bury me—although it went thirty miles an hour, and I with the utmost scare of my life could not have managed ten perhaps—by porting my helm, without carrying sail, and, so working a traverse, I kept the weather-gage of it, and that made all the difference.

Of course I was stung in the face and neck as bad as a thousand mosquitoes when the skirts of the whirl flapped round at me, but what was that to care about? It gave me pleasure to walk in such peril, and feel myself almost out of it by virtue of coolness and readiness. Nevertheless it gave me far greater pleasure, I can assure you, to feel hard ground beneath my feet, and stagger along the solid pebbles of the beach of Sker, where the sand-storm could not come so much.

Hereupon I do believe that, in spite of all my courage—so stout and strong in the moment of trial—all my power fell away before the sense of safety. What could my old battered life matter to any one in the world, except myself and Bunny? However, I was so truly thankful to kind Providence for preserving it, that I cannot have given less than nine jumps, and said, "Matthew, Mark, Luke and John," three times over, and in both ways.

This brought me back to the world again, as any power of piety always does when I dwell therein, and it drove me thereupon to trust in Providence no longer than the time was needful for me to recover breathing.

When I came to my breath and prudence, such a fright at first oppressed me, that I made a start for running into the foremost of the waves, thinking (if I thought at all) of lying down there, with my head kept up, and defying the sand to quench the sea.

Soon, however, I perceived that this was not advisable. Such a roar arose around me from the blows of hills and rocks, and the fretful eagerness of the sea to be at war again, and the deep sound of the distance—the voice of man could travel less than that of a sandpiper, and the foot of man might long to be the foot of a sandhopper. For the sea was rising fast up the verge of ground-swell, and a deep hoarse echo rolling down the shoaling of the surges. This to me was pleasant music, such as makes a man awake.

The color of the sun and sky was just as I had once beheld near the pearl-grounds of Ceylon, where the bottom of the sea comes up with a very mournful noise, and the fish sing dirges, and no man, however clear of eye, can open the sea and the sky asunder. And by this time being able to look round a little—for the air was not so full of sand, though still very thick and dusty—I knew that we were on the brink of a kind of tornado, as they call it in the tropics,—a storm that very seldom comes into these northern latitudes, being raised by violence of heat, as I have heard a surveyor say, the air going upward rapidly, with a great hole left below it.

Now as I stood on watch, as it were, and, being in such a situation, longed for more tobacco, what came to pass was exactly this—so far as a man can be exact when his wits have long been failing him.

The heaven opened, or rather seemed to be cloven by a sword-sweep, and a solid mass of lightning fell, with a cone like a red-hot anvil. The ring of black rocks received its weight, and leaped like a boiling cauldron, while the stormy waters rose into a hiss and heap of steam. Then the crash of heaven stunned me.

When I came to myself it was raining as if it had never rained before. The rage of sand and air was beaten flat beneath the rain, and the fretful lifting of the sea was hushed off into bubbles.