

ing intently on our starboard quarter; where a fold in the cloud-canopy was lifted, disclosing a streak of dull green light, verging to red on the horizon. Almost as I looked, I saw the old, confident smile tremble on his lips when he called out:

"Stand by your top-sail halliards and sheets!"

By this time, the Whitkirk had rolled most of the water from her decks, but the men were still in a half-drowned, stunned condition. Before they reached the halliards, the wind was right aft again; it came out with a low moan, followed by an angry snarl, rising almost to a shriek, as peal after peal of Heaven's artillery echoed and re-echoed across the sky—a sky from which the light of day had suddenly been quenched.

I tried desperately, to keep her before the sea; but, in that pandemonium of contending forces, it was mere guess-work. The shriek was followed by the entire force of the hurricane. At the first blast, I heard the sound of halliards on the run and felt Matson's hand grip my shoulder, his fingers acting as a signal; for no voice of man could penetrate the howling discord of raging wind and detonating thunder——twice he pressed my shoulder down, and twice I put the wheel down——once, he almost lifted me off my feet with a sudden, upward grip, which caused me to send the wheel flying round; and I saw the boiling foam on another mountain of water pass like enshadowed, drifting snow on either side.

In the midst of it all—as if to add the fury of fire to the battle of the winds—flash after flash of sky-splitting lightning ran in jagged rivers of liquid fire from zenith to sea. Their hellish light had scarcely vanished, when, right overhead, an awful crack of thunder exploded with such terrific force that the raging sea and tempest seemed stilled by its vibrations—vibrations which shook my hands on the wheel, and set all the loose bolts in the yards dancing the devil's hornpipe to the awesome light of fireballs at our mast-heads, electric fire on iron yard and wire rigging, and the smell of burning sulphur in our nostrils.

The climax lasted but a few moments, but moments seem hours when the elements are at war and man stands by, helpless.

After the thunderbolt, torrents of hail beat down upon our decks—not the pretty, white pellets of the common hailstorm, but hail, like frost-encrusted shrapnel; which scored my hands and drove the remnants of our crew, who had not already hidden, into any nook or corner to cower from their lacerating force. But the hailstones did more—they mastered and half quelled the sea, which ceased to boil and foam, even its mountains became swelling plains of water under their perforating force; and the wind—the foe that had seemed omnipotent—was sliced into millions of air-shafts. The storm, in its inception, had a sting in its tail which was self destructive. Scarcely had the burning titillation, resulting from that sting, passed from my hands and face, when—out from the starboard quarter, where the skipper had watched the dull light, came a gentle breeze from the East; the precursor of the North-east trades, our landward breeze resuming its rightful place on the ocean. The hurricane would pass on, gathering force and area on its course, whilst we cleared up the wreckage and clung to the fringe of the welcome trades; with our yards sharp up on the starboard tack; a lumpy, troubled sea; and just a glint of the setting sun glowing angrily on the Western horizon.

But, what of the Marmion? Barely had our yards swung round, than, away on our quarter, we sighted our rival——a shattered wreck,——only her mizzen-mast pointed skywards; the fore and main t'gallent and top-masts were mere encumbering wreckage, hanging over bow and waist like the dishevelled hair of a storm-tossed mermaid;——our men stopped pulling,——Matson strode aft; as he passed me I saw a strange, gray shadow on his face.

Obedient to a motion of his hand, I put the helm down and brought the ship to the wind, deadening her way, and wondering at the lifeless, forlorn aspect of the crippled ship—it was unlike Captain Styles to stagnate in a crisis.