

Nor dared I look into the sea,
Where the old man's body lay.

"The captain in his cabin kept,
And bolted fast the door; 100
The seamen, they walked up and down,
And wished the calm was o'er.

"The captain's son was on board with us,
A fair child, seven years old,
With a merry face that all men loved, 105
And a spirit kind and bold.

"I loved the child; and I took his hand
And made him kneel, and pray
That the crime for which the calm was sent
Might clean be purged away. 110

"For I thought that God would hear his prayer,
And set the vessel free:
'T was a dreadful curse, to lie becalmed
Upon that charnel sea.

"Yet I told him not wherefore he prayed, 115
Nor why the calm was sent;
I could not give that knowledge dark
To a soul so innocent.

"At length I saw a little cloud
Rise in that sky of flame, 120
A little cloud, that grew and grew,
And blackened as it came.

"We saw the sea beneath its track
Grow dark as was the sky;
And waterspouts, with rushing sound, 125
Like giants passed us by.

"And all around, 'twixt sky and sea,
A hollow wind did blow;
The sullen waves swung heavily;

The ship rocked to and fro. 130

“I knew it was that fierce death-calm
Its horrid hold undoing;
I saw the plagues of wind and storm
Their missioned work pursuing.

“There was a yell in the gathering winds, 135
A groan in the heaving sea:
The captain rushed from his place below,
But durst not look on me.

“He seized each rope with a madman’s haste,
And set the helm to go, 140
And every sail he crowded on
As the furious winds did blow.

“Away they went, like autumn leaves
Before the tempest’s rout;
The naked masts came crashing down, 145
The wild ship plunged about.

“The men to spars and splintered boards
Clung, till their strength was gone;
And I saw them from their feeble hold
Washed over, one by one; 150

“And ’mid the creaking timber’s din,
And the roaring of the sea,
I heard the dismal, drowning cries
Of their last agony.

“There was a curse in the wind that blew, 155
A curse in the boiling wave;
And the captain knew that vengeance came
From the old man’s ocean-grave.

“I heard him say, as he sate apart,
In a hollow voice and low, 160
“T is a cry of blood doth follow us,
And still doth plague us so!’

“And then those heavy iron chests
With desperate strength took he,
And ten of the strongest mariners 165
Did cast them into the sea.

“And out from the bottom of the sea
There came a hollow groan; —
The captain by the gunwale stood,
And looked like icy stone, 170
With a gasping sob he drew in his breath,
And spasms of death came on.

“And a furious boiling wave rose up,
With a rushing thundering roar;
I saw him fall before its force, 175
But I never saw him more.

“Two days before, when the storm began,
We were forty men and five,
But ere the middle of that night
There were but two alive — 180

“The child and I: we were but two;
And he clung to me in fear.
Oh! it was pitiful to see
That meek child in his misery,
And his little prayers to hear. 185

“At length, as if his prayers were heard,
’T was calmer; and anon
The clear sun shone; and, warm and low,
A steady wind from the west did blow,
And drove us gently on. 190

“And on we drove, and on we drove,
That fair young child and I;
His heart was as a man’s in strength,
And he uttered not a cry.

“There was no bread within the wreck, 195

And water we had none,
Yet he murmured not, and talked of hope,
When my last hopes were gone:
I saw him waste and waste away,
And his rosy cheek grow wan. 200

“Still on we drove, I know not where,
For many nights and days,
We were too weak to raise a sail,
Had there been one to raise.

“Still on we went, as the west wind drove, 205
On, o’er the pathless tide;
And I lay in sleep, ’twixt life and death,
With the young child at my side.

“And, as we thus were drifting on
Amid the Great South Sea, 210
An English vessel passed us by
That was sailing cheerily.
Unheard by me that vessel hailed,
And asked what we might be.

“The young child at the cheer rose up, 215
And gave an answering word;
And they drew him from the drifting wreck,
As light as is a bird.

“They took him gently in their arms,
And put again to sea: — 220
‘Not yet! not yet!’ he feebly cried;
‘There was a man with me!’

“Again unto the wreck they turned,
Where, like one dead, I lay;
And a ship-boy small had strength enough 225
To carry me away.

“Oh! joy it was, when sense returned,
That fair warm ship to see,
And to hear the child within his bed

Speak pleasant words to me! 230

“I thought at first that we had died;
That all our pain was o’er,
And in a blessed ship of Heaven
We voyaged to its shore:

“But they were human forms that knelt 235
Beside our bed to pray,
And men with hearts most merciful
That watched us night and day.

“T was a dismal tale I had to tell 240
Of wreck and wild distress;
But, even then, I told to none
The captain’s wickedness.

“For I loved the boy, and could not cloud
His soul with sense of shame;
’T were an evil thing, thought I, to blast 245
A sinless orphan’s name!
So he grew to be a man of wealth
And honourable fame.

“And in after years, when he had ships,
I sailed with him the sea, 250
And in all the sorrows of my life
He was a friend to me;
And God hath blessed him everywhere
With a great prosperity.”

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