

the strange sail being plainly seen on the line of the horizon, and the distance between the *Pantaloön* and her prey rapidly lessening.

"Clear away the gun forward and give her a blank cartridge," was an order obeyed as soon as given. The long thirty-two pounder bellowed forth, and the flash illumined momentarily the excited faces on deck. As the report died away, all eyes were bent on the chase to discover if she obeyed that authoritative signal to "heave to;" but her white sails still gleamed in the moonlight, and she pursued her course regardless of the mandate. This perseverance in attempting to escape gave good assurance that we were in pursuit of a slave-ship. Many of the crew began already in imagination to spend their prize-money; the Kroomen especially were chuckling with delight, for the very day preceding, at their earnest request—made in consequence of no slaver having been seen for some months—the figure-head of the *Pantaloön* (a capital reproduction of the well-known personage in the pantomime) had had his spectacles repainted, "to make him see better."<sup>1</sup>

The proverbial "slip between cup and lip" had, however, yet to be illustrated. The guns having been again loaded, this time with shot, the gunner was standing, lanyard in hand, awaiting the order to fire, when the captain's attention was attracted by the flapping of the sails—which hitherto had kept full—against the masts; the land wind had suddenly subsided, and a hot stifling calm succeeded. On looking round he discovered in one quarter of the horizon the small cloud, literally as a man's hand, which to experienced eyes betokens the quick approach of a tornado; and he knew well that, if one of these awful tropical storms struck the ship while all sail was set, nothing but the loss of her masts could save her.

No time now to think of aught but the safety of the ship. "Hands shorten sail! Quick, men,—quick,—for your lives!" shouted the captain. The crew, aware of the danger, worked well; sail after sail was taken in, until, instead of a cloud of canvas, the cruiser showed nothing aloft but the clear tracery of spars and rigging. In time, and only just in time, was the work completed, the ship made snug and the men down from aloft.

Meanwhile the cloud had rapidly increased in volume until now it overspread half the horizon, the remainder of the heavens being yet bright and clear. The dead silence of expectation was broken by a low growl of thunder. One breath of wind, cold as from

a charnel-house, passed over—a few big drops of rain splashed upon the deck. Then closed round the ship the arch of the storm-cloud; and with a mighty roar, lashing the water into foam, the tornado swept down upon us.

Notwithstanding all our precautions, the first shock threw the *Pantaloön* nearly on her beam-ends; for a few moments of painful suspense she remained in that position, then suddenly righting—all her timbers groaning—gradually yielded to her helm. Immediate danger was now over, it being only necessary to keep the ship driving before the wind until the storm should subside. The officers, released from their deepest anxiety, were now able to note—some even to enjoy—the magnificent spectacle of an African tornado. In that roaring wind and deafening thunder no man could hear his fellow speak, or in the thick darkness see the rope to which he clung or the deck whereon he stood, save when, the blinding lightning at quick recurring intervals disclosed the wild scene around him.

Two hours passed thus, and the fury of the tornado began to decrease, when—with a simultaneous crash of thunder—the lightning struck our foremast. On reaching the deck the electric fluid was first attracted by the chain cable, along which it ran hissing until, reaching the quarter-deck, it leaped with a loud report to the nearest gun, flashing from gun to gun until it plunged into the water astern, the old helmsman as it passed him ducking his head as he would to an enemy's shot. Happily no one was seriously hurt, although some men standing round the mast were partially stunned. The thunder now ceased, and the wind fell. Quitting my station on the fore-castle, I joined the officers on the quarter-deck, where we congratulated ourselves that the elements had done their worst, and speculated on the chances of the morning light gladdening our eyes with a view of the lost slaver. In all probability, though, the tornado had either capsized or driven her far beyond our reach.

It being now midnight, I was stepping, wearily enough, towards the companion-ladder, intending to go below, when I was met by an officer who rushed violently up the ladder and attempted to pass me. Recognizing our surgeon—who was suffering from a severe attack of yellow fever—I attempted to stop him, but, tearing himself from my grasp with the strength of delirium, he forced his way overboard.

Giving orders to the boatswain's mate to call away the lifeboat's crew, I sprang aft and let go the life-buoy. The portfire attached to the apparatus blazed up, and by

<sup>1</sup> A fact.