

But dirty weather soon set in, and the pumping—which had been throughout the voyage a cause of grumbling—became more fagging than ever; as Jack, whose hands were skinned by the ropes and his back stiff with the bending, had good reason to know. The men no longer chanted—

“They say, old man, your horse will die—
They say so—and they think so—”

as the beam was jerked up and down. Mutinous growls were the chorus now. The way the skipper behaved in bad weather puzzled the men. He would scarcely take a stitch of canvas off the ship when she was lying over so that her yards nearly dipped into the water.

“It’s my belief,” Jack heard one of his friends say to another, “that the old man’s either mad, or else he’s bribed to sink the ship, and gets so drunk he forgets he’ll go down in her. If Mr. Munnens would put the skipper in irons, I’d stand by him.”

The rowdies, however, although they did grumble at the pumping, were on the skipper’s side. He raved at *them*, too, sometimes, but he maintained no discipline. He made very little fuss even when the mate told him that the cargo had been broached, and a barrelful of spirit-bottles stolen.

The skipper was carrying on as usual one day, although black, ragged clouds, like dusty cobwebs, were fast mounting from all sides of the horizon. The distant sea was bristled by the hurricane that was rushing towards the ship.

As Mr. Croghan shouted, “Stand by the royal halyards!” the royals flew in rags from the bolt-ropes, and the royal masts snapped like twigs. The skipper, drunk as usual, came reeling from his cabin, but Mr. Munnens rushed before him.

“All hands on deck!” the mate bellowed, and his watch came tumbling up half-drunk. Down came the hail in lumps like jagged pebbles. Down, too, through the night-black sky shot a great *lump* of lightning, and sank like a seething mass of molten metal into the black sea. Blue and pink and yellow zigzags constantly scarred the sky, and peal after peal came the awful, overlapping thunder. Tacks and sheets doubled like whip-lashes; the fiercely flapping canvas made a thunder of its own; the thick main-yard was snapped in the slings as you might break a lath across your knee. The *Onyx* lay over so that it seemed impossible she could ever come up again. When Jack went up the weather-rigging—tauter than harp-strings—behind two of his old friends, to give a hand in shortening sail, his heart was

in his mouth; and though he expected to be whirled off like a withered leaf, yet he had just time for one thought, that stabbed him like a knife, about his mother and his sisters from whom he had run away.

But the *Onyx* did right herself when they got the canvas off her, and was still afloat next morning, when the sky was bright again, and the zebra-striped Cape pigeons were flitting blithely over the subsiding sea. Masses of seaweed, too, were floating on the waves. The captain, however, obstinately refused to follow the mate’s advice to bear up for Table Bay, and ordered out the boats. “You’re robbing your owners, if you desert her, Captain Mitchell,” said Mr. Munnens. “I’ll stake my life we can take her into Cape Town.”

“Obey orders, if you break owners, sir,” growled the skipper.

“Obey orders, and break underwriters, Captain Mitchell—that’s it, isn’t it?” answered the mate. “I won’t leave her while she’ll float—who’ll stay with me?”

Most of the men went over the side with the captain, but Mr. Croghan, and the carpenter, and Jack, and three or four of the men, stopped with Mr. Munnens; and after a very anxious day, Table Mountain stood up clearly dark against the sky, and the *Onyx* floundered past Robben Island, and let go her anchor in Table Bay.

The underwriters made a handsome present to the mates and the men who had stuck to the *Onyx*, when they got to hear of what had happened, since she had been insured shamefully above her value. Perhaps the underwriters might have had something unpleasant to say to Captain Mitchell; but he and the men who went with him never turned up again.

A very different skipper from Captain Mitchell took Jack home out of charity; but though he had been kindly treated, Jack respectfully declined the captain’s offer to take him as an apprentice when they got back to England. A brown, shabby little urchin was Jack when he reached home. He was considerably ashamed of himself as well as his shabbiness, when his mother and sisters rushed out to meet him; but they seemed so proud of his brownness that Jack grew proud of it too, and bragged of his adventures, especially when he found that he was not to go back to Elm House.

He is rather apt to give himself airs when nautical matters are discussed, on account of his extensive maritime experience; but he has never gone back to sea—as a sailor.