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# A Vision of the Sea

Percy Bysshe Shelley

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'Tis the terror of tempest. The rags of the sail  
Are flickering in ribbons within the fierce gale:  
From the stark night of vapours the dim rain is driven,  
And when lightning is loosed, like a deluge from heaven,  
She sees the black trunks of the water-spouts spin,  
And bend, as if heaven was raining in,  
Which they seem'd to sustain with their terrible mass  
As if ocean had sank from beneath them: they pass  
To their graves in the deep with an earthquake of sound,  
And the waves and the thunders made silent around  
Leave the wind to its echo. The vessel, now toss'd  
Through the low-trailing rack of the tempest, is lost  
In the skirts of the thunder-cloud: now down the sweep  
Of the wind-cloven wave to the chasm of the deep  
It sinks, and the walls of the watery vale  
Whose depths of dread calm are unmoved by the gale,  
Dim mirrors of ruin hang gleaming about;  
While the surf, like a chaos of stars, like a rout  
Of death-flames, like whirlpools of fire-flowing iron  
With splendour and terror the black ship environ,  
Or like sulphur-flakes hurl'd from a mine of pale fire  
In fountains spout o'er it. In many a spire  
The pyramid-billows with white points of brine  
In the cope of the lightning inconstantly shine,  
As piercing the sky from the floor of the sea.  
The great ship seems splitting! it cracks as a tree,  
While an earthquake is splintering its root, ere the blast  
Of the whirlwind that stripped it of branches has past.  
The intense thunder-balls which are raining from heaven  
Have shatter'd its mast, and it stands black and riven.  
The chinks suck destruction. The heavy dead hulk  
On the living sea rolls an inanimate bulk,  
Like a corpse on the clay which is hung'ring to fold  
Its corruption around it. Meanwhile, from the hold,  
One deck is burst up from the waters below,  
And it splits like the ice when the thaw-breezes blow  
Ø'er the lakes of the desert! Who sit on the other?  
Is that all the crew that lie burying each other,  
Like the dead in a breach, round the foremast? Are those  
Twin tygers, who burst, when the waters arose,  
In the agony of terror, their chains in the hold;  
(What a death-panic scene is that! the vessel's hold)

The wide world of waters is vibrating. Where  
Is the ship? On the verge of the wave where it lay  
One tyger is mingled in ghastly affray  
With a sea-snake. The foam and the smoke of the battle  
Stain the clear air with sunbows; the jar, and the rattle  
Of solid bones crush'd by the infinite stress  
Of the snake's adamantine voluminousness;  
And the hum of the hot blood that spouts and rains  
Where the gripe of the tyger has wounded the veins,  
Swollen with rage, strength, and effort; the whirl and the splash

As of some hideous engine whose brazen teeth smash  
The thin winds and soft waves into thunder; the screams  
And hissings crawl fast o'er the smooth ocean streams,  
Each sound like a centipede. Near this commotion,  
A blue shark is hanging within the blue ocean,  
The fin-winged tomb of the victor. The other  
Is winning his way from the fate of his brother,  
To his own with the speed of despair. Lo! a boat  
Advances; twelve rowers with the impulse of thought  
Urge on the keen keel, the brine foams. At the stern  
Three marksmen stand levelling. Hot bullets burn  
In the breast of the tyger, which yet bears him on  
To his refuge and ruin. One fragment alone,  
'Tis dwindling and sinking, 'tis now almost gone,  
Of the wreck of the vessel peers out of the sea.  
With her left hand she grasps it impetuously,  
With her right she sustains her fair infant. Death, Fear,  
Love, Beauty, are mixed in the atmosphere;  
Which trembles and burns with the fervour of dread  
Around her wild eyes, her bright hand, and her head,  
Like a meteor of light o'er the waters! her child  
Is yet smiling, and playing, and murmuring; so smiled  
The false deep ere the storm . Like a sister and brother  
The child and the ocean still smile on each other,  
Whilst—