

# **A Vision of the Sea**

Percy Bysshe Shelley

1820

'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  
O'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 now makes them tame, is what then made them bold;)   
Who crouch, side by side, and have driven, like a crank,  
The deep grip of their claws through the vibrating plank.  
Are these all? Nine weeks the tall vessel had lain  
On the windless expanse of the watery plain,  
Where the death-darting sun cast no shadow at noon,  
And there seem'd to be fire in the beams of the moon,  
Till a lead-colour'd fog gather'd up from the deep  
Whose breath was quick pestilence; then, the cold sleep  
Crept, like blight through the ears of a thick field of corn,  
O'er the populous vessel. And even and morn,  
With their hammocks for coffins the seamen aghast  
Like dead men the dead limbs of their comrades cast

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