

than his had done its work. Judgment had been passed. He did not know it. He knew nothing more than that his ship was lost, burning and abandoned.

The wind was freshening from the west. The sun had not yet risen. It was dawn; and for us the light of that day came first not from the sun. I don't know how long it was from the first explosion to the time the ship's boats—first one then the other—drew away from the burning sides, the oars pulled frantically and irregularly, pulled by strength rising from fear that had left reason twisted into smoke. There was little talking, hardly a look at what was still in front of our eyes.

Two of the crew had been left behind—one trapped in the crow's nest, the other in the gun-turret, where he had rushed with the first alarm and from which sheeting of flame made escape impossible. There was no help for them. Their shrieks had quietened into unconsciousness and death before the boats had splashed the water. Trapped in the crow's nest, at first high above the flames—but a metal crow's nest on a metal mast meant torture that even the Devil in his mockery might have blanched at. Metal that carried through itself a molten angry inescapable heat. That man was dead before the flames reached him. Cooked meat. And dead.

Many of the men in the boats had been burned, their bodies lashed by flames, with fear so far knotting into nothingness the pain that in days to follow could be eased only by death. In several cases that pain was relieved. Mercifully. The need to race from the flaming ship before the second explosion was so desperate that every man had to pull an oar. Every man, burned or not.

With some of them it was the triumph of the struggle for continued life against the supremacy of pain. A grim and cruel fight. Emotions that showed no mercy. Hands with the flesh burnt were later found to be seared to the wood of the oars. "Bless all that sail in her." The words go through my mind. Hands that with a knife later had to be cut from those oars. Shrieks that were sharper than that knife and more piercing than its steel.

Still there was no second explosion. Dully we wondered. The forward section of the ship was a shrine of smoke.

"The smoke. Jesus, look at that smoke. It's driving forward across the bows. The smoke—it's swung round. The wind's changed. Christ, the wind . . ." For the first time since leaving his ship the captain spoke, he stood to his feet. Not yet was he past caring. I could not catch his meaning, my mind had lost its reasoning.

But the wind had changed. The smoke, the flames, were chasing ahead and over the bows into the sea—driving away from the other compartments of the ship. The wind was freshening; with every minute it became stronger. The captain was on his feet. There was hope in his face, a new hope.

With fierce words and angry tones he threshed into us some of the strength and meaning of the hope responsible for the light in his eyes of chance for life; the chance that had made him rise to his feet, the hope he made us feel and sense even if we could not understand or see the reasons for it. His shouted imprecations pressed into us the spirit that once more pulled those oars—back again.

The wind had changed. The fire was driving not further into but out of the ship. We began to understand the reasons for his cursing excitement, the light in his eyes, his standing to his feet.

We saw that chance. Not many of us caring. Men had been burned; it was too late for caring. But the ship's boats returned, closer to their ship, the captain's ship. The oars moved slowly, jerking; there was none of the rhythm of the dip-flash-dip of regular rowing. Men had been burned; and in them even though there was nothing left for talk, for reason, for thought or understanding, there was still, even then, room for fear—fear of that second explosion, fear of the wind blowing back on itself and the promise it had given, changing again its direction. Fear of what already had passed and was there still. Just fear. The oars moved slowly, no rhythm; they would not have moved at all if it had not been for the captain, his standing to his feet again, that look in