

# Stephen Crane The Open Boat

A Tale intended to be after the fact. Being the experience of four men from the sunk steamer "Commodore"

I

None of them knew the color of the sky. Their eyes glanced level, and were fastened upon the waves that swept toward them. These waves were of the hue of slate, save for the tops, which were of foaming white, and all of the men knew the colors of the sea. The horizon narrowed and widened, and dipped and rose, and at all times its edge was jagged with waves that seemed thrust up in points like rocks. Many a man ought to have a bath-tub larger than the boat which here rode upon the sea. These waves were most wrongfully and barbarously abrupt and tall, and each froth-top was a problem in small-boat navigation.

The cook squatted in the bottom and looked with both eyes at the six inches of gunwale which separated him from the ocean. His sleeves were rolled over his fat forearms, and the two flaps of his unbuttoned vest dangled as he bent to bail out the boat. Often he said: "Gawd! That was a narrow clip." As he remarked it he invariably gazed eastward over the broken sea.

The oiler, steering with one of the two oars in the boat, sometimes raised himself suddenly to keep clear of water that swirled in over the stern. It was a thin little oar and it seemed often ready to snap.

The correspondent, pulling at the other oar, watched the waves and wondered why he was there.

The injured captain, lying in the bow, was at this time buried in that profound dejection and indifference which comes, temporarily at least, to even the bravest and most enduring when, willy nilly, the firm fails, the army loses, the ship goes down. The mind of the master of a vessel is rooted deep in the timbers of her, though he commanded for a day or a decade, and this captain had on him the stern impression of a scene in the greys of dawn of seven turned faces, and later a stump of a top-mast with a white ball on it that slashed to and fro at the waves, went low and lower, and down. Thereafter there was something strange in his voice. (Although steady, it was, deep with mourning, and of a quality beyond oration or tears.)

"Keep 'er a little more south, Billie," said he.

The oiler      The captain

"A little more south, 'sir," said the oiler in the stern.

A seat in this boat was not unlike a seat upon a bucking broncho, and by the same token, a broncho is not much smaller. The craft pranced and reared, and plunged like an animal. As each wave came, and she rose for it, she seemed like a horse making at a fence outrageously high. The manner of her scramble over these walls of water is a mystic thing, and, moreover, at the top of them were ordinarily these problems in white water, the foam racing down from the summit of each wave, requiring a new leap, and a leap from the air. Then, after scornfully bumping a crest, she would slide, and race, and splash down a long incline, and arrive bobbing and nodding in front of the next menace.

slate - gray w/ tinge of blue w/ white tops

sometimes life is like this, with jagged edges and ominous, rocky points assigning blame or fault to the waves

gunwale - upper edge of boat

inches from possibility of death in the ocean

The oiler - proactive / steering not much defense against the icy waves - could also describe their nerves or state of mind over time

The correspondent - also rowing but reflecting on how he got in this situation

The injured captain - feels responsible for his crew. Memory of 7 faces - now only 3 crewmen remain w/ him. He is never the same

The dingey is compared to a bucking broncho / a horse attempting a terrifying leap, and then having to race down a treacherous hill, unsure if the animal will crash or survive. And if it lives, start all over again w/ another dangerous leap.