



Captain Kerry's Demon

by Tell Payne

Waves shattered against the ship's hull, spraying the deck and crew with pelts of salty water. Wind raged and bellowed, threatening to rend the ship to slivers. An icy grip held the crew. Though they were all seasoned sailors and had seen their way out of many storms before, none had ventured into a storm such as this. Fear welled up in the men with each heave of the ship, and though frightened for their lives, not one of them dared approach Captain Kerry as he stood at the ship's helm, silhouetted black against the angry heavens.

A figure next to the captain shouted, "Sir, the men are finished, and the ship nearly so as well!"

Being a cautious man by nature, the news of his crew concerned Kerry, but it was to be expected. He had told them where they were sailing to.

A rough guffaw escaped his lips, "It's always darker before the morn! We'll be through this before ye can scatter below deck!"

Lightning flashed atop waves many times the height of the ship. Rain and hail began to blow in sheets.

Turning to the figure next to him, Kerry shouted, "Get yerself and the crew below. I'll face this demon myself!"

Moving with dexterity born at sea, the figure moved among the crew and issued the captain's orders. In moments the deck was emptied, save for the captain himself.

The ship heaved again, but was kept upright through Kerry's skill and strength. A clash of lightning shattered the main mast, blasting slivers in all directions. One found its way to Kerry, ripping open his right cheek. But nothing dismayed or slighted his resolve. Kerry was more determined than the Maelstrom was angry. Whether it counted for anything or not, he was certain of his success.

A great wave came crashing down on the vessel, nearly dislodging Kerry from his post. Reaching down, Kerry picked up a rope and began tying himself to the wheel. Nothing could stop him from attaining his goal.

He raised his head high and bellowed at the Maelstrom. "Ha! Is that all ye've got? Is it? It will take more than a bit of water and wind to stop me! Blow all ye want, I'll make it

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through!”

The ship crested a wave and plummeted down. For a moment, Kerry thought that ship would shatter. An instant moment later, the ship hit the water, dipping for a second beneath the surface, then bobbed upright again.

After shaking the sea from his face, the captain looked around. The vulnerable vessel was in a bowl, surrounded on each side by towering waves hundreds of feet tall. Now did Kerry begin to despair. He ground his teeth and snarled, made certain his rope was secure, then gripped tighter to the wheel.

Light danced across the waves, and wind echoed off of them. The ship rested almost still in the center of the bowl.

“Is that how ye’re gonna have it, then? This had better be good! Show me what ye’ve got!”

Lightning crashed next to the ship, illuminating the bowl. All sound was silenced, and time seemed to stop. Waves towered above the ship, rain and hail fell no more. Kerry drew a deep breath. Then all came back to life.

In an instant, the waves shattered the ship, dragging Kerry below. He reached for the dagger in his boot to cut himself free from the wheel dragging him down. The blade was razor sharp and made quick work of the bindings, but Kerry was still being dragged under despite his struggles.

His lungs began to burn, his chest felt ready to explode, but still he fought for the surface. And still, he was dragged down. The weight of the sea crushing in on him sent the burning breath from his lungs.

He could fight no longer. As he surrendered himself, he was surrounded by light.



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First Published December, 2009.

