

White-Maned Horses

White-Maned Horses begins amidst a relentless storm, where the narrator battles against towering waves while steering *Flower*, a boat caught in the fury of nature. The wind howls like a beast, rattling the mast, and the rain stings against their skin as if the sky itself is lashing out. The sea churns violently, heaving the vessel toward the treacherous rocks lining the shore, each crash of water a grim reminder of what awaits if they lose control. Despite their fear, it is not the idea of sinking that unsettles them most, but the possibility of being shattered against the jagged shoreline, unable to fight back against nature's raw force. Every muscle in their body strains against the storm, hands gripping the tiller, mind racing with every shifting gust. The narrator's survival hinges on quick thinking and sheer determination as they attempt to wrest control from the chaos.

Amidst the chaos, the anchor is deployed, a desperate attempt to steady the boat against the forceful waves. The impact of the storm remains, tossing *Flower* like a leaf caught in the wind, yet there is a moment of respite as the sail is hoisted, catching just enough wind to push them away from immediate danger. The sheer power of the moment is both exhilarating and terrifying—the boat, barely held together, miraculously holds its course. The narrator, soaked to the bone and exhausted, clings to this small victory, knowing full well that safety is still far from guaranteed. As the rain begins to lessen, the outline of land appears in the distance, a beacon of salvation and relief. But while the sight should bring comfort, it instead instills a new layer of tension, as the narrator begins to wonder what awaits them on shore.

As dawn's first light filters through the mist, the narrator stirs from a restless slumber, their body sore from the battle with the storm. The once-violent sea has calmed, though the remnants of the night's chaos remain—ropes lie tangled on the deck, supplies have been thrown about, and a deep exhaustion lingers in their bones. Shaking off fatigue, they prepare to move toward land, driven by the urgent need for food and rest. However, as they survey their surroundings, they spot an unexpected sight—a woman on the beach, standing still, watching them through a pair of binoculars. Her presence is unnerving, her expression unreadable, and as the narrator debates whether to call out, a man joins her, speaking into a phone. A creeping sense of unease takes root, as it becomes clear that this is no ordinary welcome.

The urge to act quickly pushes the narrator into motion. With hands numbed from cold, they attempt to pump the water from the boat, but the mechanism fails, leaving them scrambling for an alternative. Frustration mounts as they fashion a makeshift bellows, desperately trying to keep the boat functional. The shore, once seen as a place of salvation, now feels more like a trap, with the strangers watching their every move. The tension comes to a head as the woman suddenly reaches into her coat and draws a gun, her stance firm, her intentions unclear. Before the narrator has time to react, she fires, the sound shattering the fragile silence that had momentarily settled. Instinct takes over, and with a surge of adrenaline, they make a split-second decision—escape into the thick fog, leaving behind the ominous figures on the shore. With the wind once again at their back, they sail away into the unknown, carrying with them the weight of unanswered questions and the lingering threat of what—or who—still waits beyond the mist.