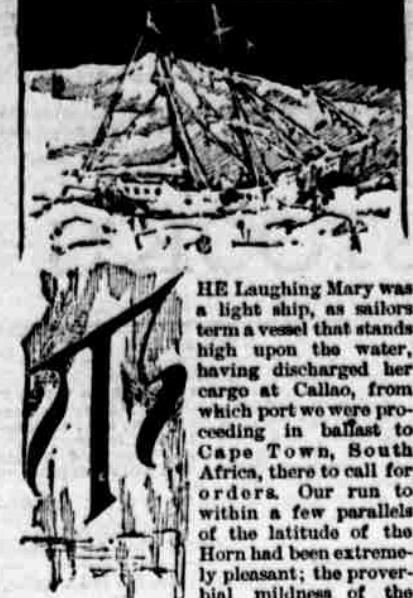


ICE BOUND.

By W. CLARK RUSSELL.

Author of "The Wreck of the Grosvenor," "Jack's Courtship," "My Watch-Bell," "The Lady Maid," etc.

CHAPTER I. THE STORM.



Pacific ocean was in upon us, the appearance of the wind and in the gentle undulations of the silver-laced swell; but scarce had we passed the height of 40 degrees when the weather grew sullen and dark, a heavy bank of clouds of a livid hue rose in the distance, and the wind came and went in small gusts, the gusts venting themselves in dreary moans, inasmuch that our oldest hands confessed they had never heard blasts more portentous.

The gale came with some lightning and several claps of thunder and heavy rain. Though it was but 9 o'clock in the afternoon, the air was so dusky that the men had to feel for the ropes; and when the first of the tempest stormed down upon us, the appearance of the sea was uncommonly terrible, being swept and mangled into boiling froth in the northeast quarter, while about us and in the southwest it lay in a sort of swollen billow of shadow, seeming into the darkness of the sky without offering the smallest glimpse of the horizon.

In a few minutes the hurricane struck us. We had bared the brig down to the close reefed main-top, yet, though we were dead before the outfit, its first blow rent the fragment of sail as if it were formed of smoke, and in an instant it disappeared, flashing over the bows, like a scattering of torn paper, leaving nothing but the ropes be- hind. The bursting of the top-sail was like the explosion of a large cannon. In a breath the brig was smothered with froth torn up in huge clouds, and hurled over and ahead of her in vast quantities, filling the air with a dismal twilight of their own, in which nothing was visible but their terrific speeding. Through these stinging, soft, and singing masses of spume drove the rain in horizontal steel like lines, which seemed to the lightning stroke, as though indeed they were barbed weapons of bright metal, darted by armies of invisible spirits raving out their war cries as they lashed us.

The storm made a loud thunder in the sky, and this tremendous utterance dominated without adverting the many screaming, hissing, shrieking and hooting noises raised in the rigging and about the decks, and the wild, seething, whirling sound of the sea, maddened by the gale and struggling in its enormous passion under the first clanking and iron grip of the hurricane's hand.

But though the first rage of the storm was terrible enough, its fiercest did not come to its height till about 11 o'clock in the middle watch. Long before then the sea had grown mountainous, and the dance of our egg shell of a brig upon it was sickening and affrighting.

No man could show himself on deck and preserve his life. Between the rails it was waist high, and this water, converted by the motions of the brig into a wild torrent, had its volume perpetually maintained by ton loads of sea, falling in dull and pondering crashes over the bows on to the forecastle. There was nothing to be done but secure the helm and await the issue below, for if we were to be drowned it would make a more agreeable funeral to the crew than the cabin, than to perish half frozen and already nearly strangled by the bitter cold and flooded tent on deck.

There was Capt. Rosy; there was myself, by name Paul Rodney, mate of the brig, and there were the remaining seven of a crew, including the carpenter. We sat in the cabin, one of us from time to time clanking his way up the ladder to peer through the companion, and we looked at one another with the melancholy of manufacturers waiting to be called from their cells for the last jaunt to Tyburn.

Thus it continued till daybreak, when of something of its mad fury went out of the well, and to our great satisfaction found but little water, only as much as we had a right to suppose she would take in above. By noon the wind had weakened yet, but the sea still ran very high, and the sky was uncommonly thick with piles of dusky, yellowish, hurrying clouds; and though we could fairly reckon upon our position, the atmosphere was so nipping it was difficult to persuade ourselves that Cape Horn was not close aboard.

We could now work the pumps, and a short spell froed the brig. We got up a new main-top-sail and bent it, and setting the reefed foresail put the vessel square to the sea. As we lay on, chased by the swollen seas. Thus we continued till we were about thirty leagues south of the parallel of the Horn, and in long and weary watches, we learned that the board-tack and brought the brig as close to the wind as it was proper to lay her for a progress that should not be wholly leeward; but four hours after we had lowered the main-top-sail, and the sea came to blow, stormed up again into its first fury, and the morning of the 1st of July, A. D., 1861, found the *Laughing Mary* passionately laboring in the sea, her jibboom and fore-top-gallant mast, her ballast shifted, so that her port-gauge, even in a calm, would have exhibited her by her starboard channels under, and her decks swept by enormous surges, which, fetching her leeward, laid her down in a thundered in mighty green masses over her.

CHAPTER II. THE ICEBERG. The loss of the spar I have named was no great matter, nor were we to be intimidated by such weather as was to be expected off Cape Horn. But there was an inveteracy in the gale which had driven us down to this part that bore heavily upon our spirits. It was impossible to trim the ballast. We dared not venture so to bring the ship on the other tack. With helm lashed and yards pointed to the wind, thus we lay, till we drifted steadily trending with the sea of each gale to the southwest, helpless, forboding, disconsolate. It was the night of the fourth day of the month. The crew were forward in the forecastle, and I knew not if any man was on deck saving myself.

blowing much longer," cried the carpenter. "The place I come from must give out soon, unless a new trade wind's got fixed into a whole gale for this here ocean."

"What's a'bout you, captain?" I asked, munching a piece of beef. "All of four miles an hour," he answered. "If this goes on I shall be glad to see the end of the world. The antarctic circle won't be far off presently, and since you're a scholar, Rodney, I'll leave you to describe what's inside of it—though you'll find it's a good deal warmer than the folks here, d'ye see. I've a mind to be known after I'm dead, and there's nothing like your signature on a mountain to be remembered by."

At this instant we were startled by a wild and fearful shout on deck. It sounded high above the sweeping and seething of the wind and the hissing of the lashed waters, and it penetrated the planks with a note that gave it an inexpressible character of anguish. "A man washed overboard!" bawled the carpenter, springing to his feet. "No!" cried I, for my younger and shrewder crew had caught a note in the cry that persuaded me it was not the carpenter said; and in the light of the lantern, I saw him jump the ladder and gained the deck.

The moment I was in the gale the same affrighted cry rang down from the wind from some man forward: "For God's sake, tumble overboard!" he called upon me. "What do you see?" I roared, sending my voice, trumpet fashion, through my hands; for as to my own and the sight of Capt. Rosy and the carpenter, why, it was like being struck blind to come on a sudden out of the lighted cabin into the blackness of the night. Any reply that might have been attempted was choked out by the dive of the brig's head into the sea, which furiously flooded her forecastle, and came washing aft like liquid in the darkness, till it was up to our knees.

"See there!" suddenly roared the carpenter. "Where, man—where?" bawled the captain. "But in this brief time my night had grown as black as the night of the day before, and the carpenter could answer, if lay on our lee beam, but how far off no man could have told in that black thickness. It stood against the darkness and hung out a dim complexion of light, rather than a shadow, and was not light—nor so described by the pen. It was like a small hill of snow, and looked as snow-does, or the foam of the sea in darkness, and it came and went with our soaring and sinking, and it was up to our knees.

"I see it," I answered. "We must drive her clear at all risks." There was no need to call the men. To the second cry that had been uttered by one among them, who had come out of the forecastle and seen the berg, they had tumbled up as sailors will when they jump for their lives; and now they came staggering, splashing and dripping, to the companion hatch, and they could see us as we stood there.

"Men," cried Capt. Rosy, "yonder's a grave-stone for our carcasses if we are not lively! Cast the helm adrift!" (we were by the tiller). "The bursting of the top-sail was like the explosion of a large cannon. In a breath the brig was smothered with froth torn up in huge clouds, and hurled over and ahead of her in vast quantities, filling the air with a dismal twilight of their own, in which nothing was visible but their terrific speeding. Through these stinging, soft, and singing masses of spume drove the rain in horizontal steel like lines, which seemed to the lightning stroke, as though indeed they were barbed weapons of bright metal, darted by armies of invisible spirits raving out their war cries as they lashed us.

"Jump!" roared the captain, in a passion of hurry. "Great thunder! 'tis close aboard! You'll leave me sea-room for veering if you don't lay an instant." "Follow me who will!" I cried out; "and others stand by ready to hoist away."

This speaking—for there seemed to my mind a sure promise of death in hesitation at this supreme moment, than in twenty such risks as laying out on the bowsprit signified—I made for the lee of the weather bulwarks and blindly hauled myself forward by such pins and gear as came to my hands. A man might spend his life on the ocean and never have to deal with such a passage as this.

I got on to the bowsprit, nearly stifled by the showering of the sea, holding an open knife between my teeth, half dashed by the prodigious motion of the light brig, which at this extreme end of her was to be felt to the full height of its extravagance. And every plunge I expected to be buried, and every moment I was prepared to be torn from my hold.

Commending myself to God, for I was now to let go with my hands, I pulled the knife from my teeth, and, feeling for the gaskets or lines which bound the sail to the spar, I cut and hacked as fast as I could ply my arms. In a flash the gale, whipping into a liberated fold of the canvas, blew the whole sail out; the bowsprit reeled and quivered under the weight of the sea, and I dashed myself, shouting to the men to hoist away. The head of the staysail mounded in thunder, and the slatting of its folds and the thrashing of its sheet was like the rattling of heavy field pieces whizzed at full gallop over a stony road.

tree cracking in fire. I could hear the mass breaking overhead—the crash and blow of spars and yards torn and striking the hull; above all, the grating of the vessel, that was now bound on the sea and swept by the billows, broadside on, along the sharp and murderous projections. Two monster seas tumbled over the bows, flooded me off my legs, and dashed me against the tiller, to which I clung. I heard no cry. I regained my feet, clinging with a death grip to the tiller, and, seeing no one near me, tried to hold, to know if any man were living, but could not make my voice sound.



Clinging to a death grip to the tiller.

The fearful grating noise ceased on a sudden, and the faintness of the berg loomed upon the starboard bow. We had been hurried clear of it and were leeward; but what was our condition? I tried to shout again, but to no purpose, and was in the act of quitting the tiller to go forward, when I was struck over the brows by something from aloft—a block, as I believe—and fell senseless upon the deck.

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