

ICE BOUND.

By W. CLARK RUSSELL.

Author of "The Wreck of the Grosvenor," "Jack's Courtship," "My Watch-Belton," "The Lady Maid," &c.

His sudden determination that we should stand or fall by my scheme was not very useful to me. I had looked for some shrewdness in him, some capacity of originating and weighing ideas, but I found he could do little more than curse and swagger and ply his can, in which he found most of his anecdotes and recollections and not a little of his courage. I pulled out my watch, as I must call it, and observed that it was hard upon 1 o'clock.

"The lucky," said he, eyeing the watch greedily and coming to it away from the great subject of our conversation, "the sight of the fine gold thing with its jeweled links extinguished every other thought in him, 'that you removed that watch from Monday. But he will have carried other good things to the bottom with him. I fear.' "His flask and tobacco box I took away," said I. "He had nothing of consequence besides."

"They must go into the common chest," cried he, "his share and share alike." "Ay," said I, "but what I found on Mendoza is mine by the highest right under heaven. I had not taken the things they would call at the bottom of the sea."

"What of that?" cried he, savagely. "If we had not plundered the galleon he had down with her. Yet should such a consideration be a fair mission as between us—between you, who had nothing to do with the pillage, and me, who risked my life in it?" I said, "Very well; but as you say," appearing to consent, for there was something truly absurd in his mission about a few guineas worth of booty in the face of our melancholy and most perilous position, though it not only enabled me to send a deeper glance into the mind of this man than I had yet been able to manage, but it was a very good reason for the bloody and furious quarrel which have again and again arisen among persons standing on the brink of eternity, to whom a cup of drink or the sight of a ship had been more precious than the contents of the Bank of England.

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"Overboard!" I cried. "Why, yes," said he. "They are no good on deck. I stood them against the rail, then tipped them overboard." "This was an illustration of his strength I did not much relish. 'I doubt if I could have lifted Barros,' said I. 'Not you!' he exclaimed, running his eye over me. 'A dead Dutchman's weight would weigh the weight of a fairy alongside Barros,' said I. 'Well, Mr. Tassard,' said I, 'since you are so strong you will be very useful to our scheme. There is need to be done.' 'Give me a sketch of your plan that I may understand you,' he exclaimed, continuing to eat very heartily.

"First of all," said I, "we shall have to seek the powder barrels out of the magazine and hoist them on deck. There are twelve, I suppose?" "You should be able to find what you want among the boatswain's stores in the run," he replied. "There are some splits wide enough to receive a whole barrel of powder," said I. "I counted four such yawns all happily lying in a line athwart the ice past the bows. I propose to sink them, and then to get a couple of barrels where they must hang from a piece of spar across the aperture."

"He nodded. 'Have you any slow matches aboard?' 'Plenty among the gunner's stores,' he replied. "There are but you and me," said I, "these operations will take time. We must mind not to be blown up by one barrel while we are suspending another. We shall have to lower the barrels with their matches on fire, and they must be timed to burn an hour."

"Ay, certainly—at least an hour," he exclaimed. "To be sure, but I am no longer loquacious." "Well, that must depend upon the number of parcels of matches we meet with. There will be a good many mines to spring, and one must not explode before another. 'To the united force of the several blasts, which we must reckon on. The contents of at least four more barrels of powder we must distribute among the other chinks and splits in such parcels as they will be able to receive.'"

"And then?" "And then," said I, "we must await the explosion, and trust to the mercy of heaven to help us." He made a hideous face, as if this was a sort of talk to nauseate him, and said: "Do you know, I have a better plan. I will take the powder and the matches, and I will set the effect from a distance?" "Why, remain on board, of course," I answered. "Suppose the mines liberated the ice on which the schooner lies, and it floated away, what should we, watching at a distance, do?"

"True," cried he, "but it is a cursed perilous. The explosion might blow the ship up." "No, it will not do that. We shall be had engineers if we bring about a thing about the danger will be providing the schooner is released—in her capsizing, as I have before pointed out."

"Enough," cried he, charging his panicle for the third time. "We must chance her capsizing." "If I had a crew at my back," said I, "I would carry an anchor and cable to the shoulder of the cliff at the end of the slope to hold the ship if she swam. I would also put a quantity of provisions on the ice along with materials for making us shelter and the whole of the stock of coal, so that we could go on supporting life here if the schooner capsized."

"Then," said he, "you would remain ashore during the explosion?" "Most certainly. But as all these preparations would mean a degree of labor impracticable by us two men, I am for the bold venture—prepare and fire the mines, return to the ship, and leave the rest to Providence."

He made another ugly face, and indulged himself in a piece of profanity that was inexpressibly disgusting and mean in the mouth of a man who was used to cross himself when alarmed and swear by the saints. But perhaps he knew, even better than I, how little he had to expect from Providence. He filled his pipe, exclaiming that he had smoked it out, and we should fall to work. Now that I had settled a plan, I was eager to put it into practice—not and wild, indeed, with the impatient and the hope of recovering his liberty and preserving his life; and I was the more anxious to set about the business at once, on account of the weather being fair and still; for if it came on to blow a stormy wind again we should be forced, as before,

under hatches. But I had to wait for the Frenchman to empty his pipe. He was so complete a sensualist that I believe nothing short of terror could have forced him to shorten the period of a pleasure by a second of time. He was smoking so busily, with such leisurely enjoyment of the flavor of the smoke, that I expected to see him fall asleep; and his patience being exhausted, I turned to look at his time his bowl held nothing but black ash.

"Now," cried he, "to work." And he rose with a prodigious yawn and seized the lantern. Our first business was to hunt among the stores in the run for tackle to hoist the powder barrels up with. There was a good collection, as might have been expected in a pirate, whose command in sailing goods from other ships' holds into his own, and the powder was frozen as hard as iron, to remedy which we carried an armful to the cook house, and left the tackle to lie and soften. We also conveyed to the cook house a quantity of ratine stuff—a thin rope, used for the making of steps in the shroud ladders; this being a stuff that would exactly serve to suspend the smaller parcels of powder in the splits. Before touching the powder barrels we put a lighted candle into the bull's-eye window of the door, and removed the lantern to a safe distance. Tassard was perfectly well acquainted with the contents of this store-room, and on my asking for the matches put in his hand one of several bags of them. They varied in length, some being six inches and some making a big coil. There was nothing for it but to sample and test them, and I took a couple of matches and lit them. The main hatch could be done that evening. The main hatch was just forward of the gunroom bulkhead; we seized a hand-spike each and went to work to pry the cover open. It was desperate tough labor—as bad as trying to open an oyster with a soft blade. The Frenchman broke out into many strange old-fashioned oaths in his own tongue, imagining the hatch to be frozen; but though I doubt the frost had something to do with it, the obstacle was not owing to the stubbornness that eight and forty years will communicate to a fixture which ice has chiseled and kept sound.

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We got the hatch open at last—be pleased to know that I am speaking of the hatch in the lower deck, for there was another immediately above it on the upper or main deck—whom a cup of drink or the sight of a ship had been more precious than the contents of the Bank of England.

I set about getting the dinner. "While you are at that work," cried he, starting up, "I'll overhaul the pockets of the bodies on deck," and picking up a chopper away he went, and I heard him cursing in his native tongue as he stumbled to the companion ladder through the darkness in the cabin.

His rapacity was beyond credence. There was an immense treasure in the hold, yet he could not leave the pockets of the two poor wretches on deck alone. I did not envy him his task; the frozen fingers