

(Continued from third page) THE FROZEN PRIZE.

BY W. CLARK RUSSELL. CHAPTER X. [Continued.]

I toiled on, and having cleared the door of the snow that bound it, I pried it apart with the hammer and then dragged at it; but the snow on the deck would not let it open far, and as there was room for me to squeeze through, I did not stop to scrape the obstruction away.

A flight of steps sank into the darkness of the interior, and a cold strange smell floated up, with something of a dry earthiness of flavor and a mingling of leather and timber. I fell back a pace to let something of this smell exhale before I ventured into an atmosphere that had been hermetically bottled by the ice in that cabin since the hour when this little door was last closed.

I descended very slowly indeed, my inclination being strong the other way, and I kept on looking downwards in a state of ridiculous fright as though at any moment I should be seized by the leg.

On reaching the bottom I remained standing close against the ladder, striving to see into what manner of place I was arrived. The glare of the whiteness of the decks and rocks hung upon my eyes like a kind of blindness charged with fires of several colors, and I could not obtain the faintest glimpse of any part of this interior outside the sphere of the little square of hazy light which lay upon the deck at the foot of the steps.

To test this conjecture I extended my arms in a groping posture and stepped a pace forward, feeling to right and left, till, having gone five or six paces from the ladder, my fingers touched something cold, and feeling it, I passed my hand down what I instantly knew by the projection of the nose and the roughness of hair on upper lip to be a human face!

A little reflection might have prepared me for this, but I had not reflected, at least in this direction, and was therefore not prepared; and the horrible thrill of that black chill contact went in an agony through my nerves, and I burst into a violent perspiration.

back; his cheeks were smooth manifestly through nature rather than the razor, and the ends of a small black mustache were twisted up to his eyes. These were the only occupants of the cabin, which their presence rendered terribly ghastly and strange.

The interior was extremely plain: the bulkheads of a mahogany colour, the decks bare, and nothing in the form of an ornament save a silver crucifix hanging by a nail to the trunk of the mainmast, and a cage with a frozen bird of gorgeous plumage suspended to the bulkhead near the hatch. A small lantern of an old pattern dangled over the table, and I noticed that it contained two or three inches of candle.

As I stepped up to the figure whose face I had touched, and felt in his pockets; but neither on him nor on the other did I find what I wanted, though I was not a little astonished to discover in the pockets of the occupants of so small and humble a ship as this schooner a fine gold watch as rich as the one I had brought away from the man on the rocks, and more elegant in shape, a gold snuffbox set with diamonds, several rings of beauty and value lying loose in the breeches pocket of the man whose face was hidden, a handful of Spanish pieces in gold, handkerchiefs of fine silk, and other articles, as if indeed these fellows had been overhauling a parcel of booty, and then carelessly returned the contents to their pockets!

But what I needed was the means of obtaining a light, so, after casting about, I thought I would search the body on deck, and went to it, and to my great satisfaction discovered what I wanted in the first pocket I dipped my hand into, though I had to rip open the mouth of it away from the snow with the hanger.

I returned to the cabin and lighted the candle, and carried the lantern into the black passage or corridor. There were four small doors belonging to as many berths; I opened the first, and entered a compartment that smelt intolerably stale and fusty. As in the cabin, so here I found this noxiousness of air was not caused by putrefaction or any tainting qualities of a vegetable or animal kind, but by the deadness of the pent-up air itself, as the foulness of bilge-water is owing to its being imprisoned from air in the bottom of the hold.

I held up the lantern and looked about me. A glance or two satisfied me that I was in a room that had been appropriated to the steward and his mates. A number of dark objects, which on inspection I found to be hams, were stowed snugly away in butter-deck; a cask half full of flour stood in a corner; near it lay a coarse sack in which was a quantity of biscuit, a piece of which I bit and found it as hard as flint and tasteless, but not in the least degree mouldy. There were four shelves running athwartships full of glass, knives and forks, dishes, and so forth, some of the glass very choice and elegant, and many of the dishes and plates also very fine, fit for the greatest nobleman's table. Under the lower shelf, on the deck, lay a sack of what I believed to be black stones until, after turning one or two so them about, it came upon me that they were, or had been I should say, potatoes.

Not to tease you with too many particulars under this head, let me briefly say that in this larder or steward's room I found about other things several cheeses, a quantity of candles, a great earthenware pot full of pease, several pounds of tobacco, about thirty lemons, along with two small casks and three or four jars, manifestly of spirits, but of what kind I could not tell. I took a stout sharp knife from one of the shelves, and pulling down one of the hams tried to cut it, but I might as well have striven to slice a piece of marble. I attempted next to cut a cheese, but this was frozen as hard as the ham. The lemons, candles, and tobacco had the same astonishing quality of stoniness, and nothing yielded to the touch but the flour. I laid hold of one of the jars, and thought to pull the stopper out, but it was frozen hard in the hole it fitted, and I was five minutes hammering it loose. When it was out I inserted a steel—and found the contents solid ice nor was there the faintest smell to tell me what the spirit or wine was.

a whole one I sat me down on the edge of a cask and fell a-munching. One reflection, however, comforted me, namely, that the petrification by freezing had kept the vitals sweet. I was sure there was little here that might not be thawed into relishable and nourishing food and drink by a good fire. The sight of these stores took such a weight off my mind that no felon reproved from death could tell more-eloquent than I. My forebodings had come to nought in this regard, and here for the moment my grateful spirits were content to stop.

(To be continued.)

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