

EDWARD BROWN, STOKER.

CONTINUED.

Well, I was working on board a steamer as they used to call the "Equator," and heavy-laden and with about twenty passengers on board, we started down channel with all well, till we got right down off the west coast of Africa, when there came one of the heaviest storms I was ever in. Even for the well-found steamer such as they can build to-day, it would have been a hard fight, but with our poor shabby wooden tub, it was a hopeless case from the first.

Our skipper made a hard fight of it, though, and tried hard to make for one of the ports; but, bless you, what can a man do when, after ten days knocking about, the coals run out, and the fires that have been kept going with wood and oil, and everything that can be thrust into the furnaces, are drowed; when the paddle-wheels are only in the way, every bit of sail set is blown clean out of the bolt ropes, and at last the ship begins to drift fast for the shore?

That was our case, and every hour the sea seemed to get higher, and the wind more fierce, while I heard from more than one man how fast the water was gaining below.

My mate and I didn't want any telling though. We'd been driven up out of the stoke-hole like a pair of drowned rats, and came on deck to find the bulwarks ripped away, and the sea every now and then leaping aboard, and washing the lumber about in all directions.

The skipper was behaving very well and he kept us all at the pumps, turn and turn, in spells, but we might as well try to pump the sea dry, and when, with the water gaining faster, we told him what we thought, he owned it was no use, and we gave up.

We'd all been at it, crew and passengers, about forty of us altogether, including the women—five of them they were, and they were all on deck, lashed in a sheltered place, close to the poop. And very pitiful it was to see them fighting hard at first and clinging to the side, but only to grow weaker, half-drowned as they were; and I saw two sink down at last and hang drooping like from their lashings, dead, for not a soul could do them a turn.

I was holding on by the shrouds when mate got to the skipper's side, and I saw in his blank, white face what he was telling him. Of course we couldn't hear his words in such a storm, but we did not want to, for his lips said plain enough: "She's sinking."

Next moment there was a rush made for the boats, and two of the passengers cut loose a couple of the women; place was made for them before the first boat was too full; she was lowered down, cast off, and a big wave carried her clear of the steamer. I saw her for a moment on the top of the ridge, and then she plunged down on the other side out of our sight—and that of everybody else; for how long she lived who can say? She was never picked up or heard of again.

Giving a bit of cheer our chaps turned to the next as was getting in, when there came a wave like a mountain, ripping her from the davits, and, when I shook the water from my eyes there she was hanging on by one end, stove in and the men who had tried to launch her gone, skipper and mate as well.

There were only seven of us now, that I could see besides the three women lashed to the side, and only one of them was alive; and for a bit no one moved, everybody being stunned like with horror; but there came a lull, and, feeling that the steamer was sinking under our feet, I shouted out to the boys to come on, and we ran to the last boat, climbed in, and were casting off when I happened to catch sight of the woman lashed under the bulwarks there.

"Hold hard!" I roars, for I saw one of them wave her hand.

"Come on, you fool!" shouts my mate, "she's going down!"

I pray I may never be put to it again like that, with all a man's selfish desire for life fighting against him. For a moment I shut my eyes, and they began to lower; but I was obliged to open them again, and as I did so, I saw a wild scared face, with long, wet hair clinging round it, and a pair of little white hands were stretched out to me as for help.

"Hold hard!" I shouts.

"No, no!" roared out two or three, "there isn't a moment," and, as the boat was being lowered from the davits I made a jump, caught the bulwarks with my hands, and climbed on board, just as she kissed the water, was unhooked, and floated away.

Then, as I crept, hand-over-hand, to the girl's side, whipped out my knife, and was cutting her loose, while her weak arms clung to me, I felt a horrible feeling of despair come over me, for the boat was leaving us; and I, what a coward I was at heart, as I had to fight with myself so as not to leave the girl to her fate and leap overboard and swim for my life. I got the better of it though, went down on my knees, so as not to see the boat, and got the poor trembling, clinging creature loose.

(Conclusion in our next.)

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