

Two hours at most the breakers call,  
And perhaps ye can guess what they'll have to say.

"Bear a hand here now for the last time boys,  
Well we've sailed the 'Old Queen' in the days  
gone by,  
And we'll sail her yet, God help her crew,  
Straight on to the rocks, unchallenged to die."

Five men, with the captain, gathered round,  
The lantern's beam in the blinding snow;  
Five heads, storm-circled, the grey and the brown.  
Five souls, life-loving, yet strong to go.

The wheel spun away from its loosened hold,  
And round swung the "Queen" through the angry  
night,  
A gather—a pause, and away she sprang  
In the freezing drift like a storm bolt white.

In the wild North's breast as a queen she rode,  
All white from the keel foamed her daring track,—  
Last foot-prints were they that were rudely caught  
And plumed into crests by the galloping pack

Of the huge sea-wolves, that howled and strained  
With jaws agape to smack their prey;  
Right hard at her heels they choked and snarled,  
And their breath swung hot into stinging spray.

But strong was the "Queen" in the tempest's  
strength,  
For as one by one they headlong leapt,  
Back-broken and gasping she hurled them down,  
And on in the storm undaunted she swept.

Straight away she flew, aye, her course was straight,  
For the hand that held never flinched or stirred.  
The light burned dim on the lives at bay,  
From the storm-matted lips broke never a word.

But they watched the chase as it sterner grew  
With eyes that saw yet did not see;  
Behind them, the life they had lived and loved,  
Before, the dark doubt of the dread "to be."

Of baby hands stretched pleading out,—  
Of maiden hands whose touch he knew,—  
Of mother hands that had blessed her boy,—  
Each heart fought its bitterness through and through.

Yes, hark! up the night like a wail from the dead  
Comes the low dull boom of the breakers' moan,  
Beneath the shrill shriek and roar of the storm  
Upwells the fierce depth of its monotone.

A shiver ran round that "circle of grey,"  
The pulse hung still in its icy thrall;

Dear grows the flesh, ah, dearer still,  
When out of the dark comes the dread death-call.

The captain's hand sought each hand in turn,  
The four hard palms of his noble crew.  
No word was said, but the long close clasp  
Wrung deep to each heart his strong adieu.

Then they caught his voice, 'twixt the thunderous  
roar  
Of the breakers' charge,—“While yet there's time  
Send aloft a prayer for our souls in distress,  
Some angel may hear and heave us a line.”

Louder rolled the roar of the rock-mad surf,  
Closer spun the squall in a winding sheet,  
Darker stooped the night to hide her sin,  
Open-armed strained the "bridegroom" his treasure  
to greet.

Not long to wait, with never a pause,  
'Mid the yeasting foam where the rocks are fed,  
One wild last plunge, a sickening crash,  
Alone, in the darkness the "Queen" was wed.

One quick-drawn breath, a mountain surge  
Swoops madly down the bond to seal.  
No feet press now the quivering deck,  
And gone at last is the hand from the wheel.

No tale tells the sea of the hearts it stills,  
Of the cries hard-choked at its strangling breast,  
Of the struggle and clutch of the drowning hands,  
Of the ooze-pillowed head forever at rest.

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Long the skipper watched as he hugged the rocks,  
All weak and spent from his fight with the foam.  
Long peered and questioned the storm's blind face,  
For sight or sound what the billows own.

In vain, the sea gives up no dead,  
The fierce foam-shreds they stiffen and blind,  
A sting in his throat, not the sting of the salt,  
To the spray-swept shore he leaves them behind.

"But gone before, who knows?" came the thought,  
Up the steep he strained with the sudden pain,  
The ice clad limbs are stiff with cold,  
In the darkness a step but to stumble again.

Wild round the worry and daze of the storm,  
The gloating brawl from the graves below.  
Oh, to get out of the sound of the mocking sea  
That alone worth the fight, knee-deep, through the  
snow.