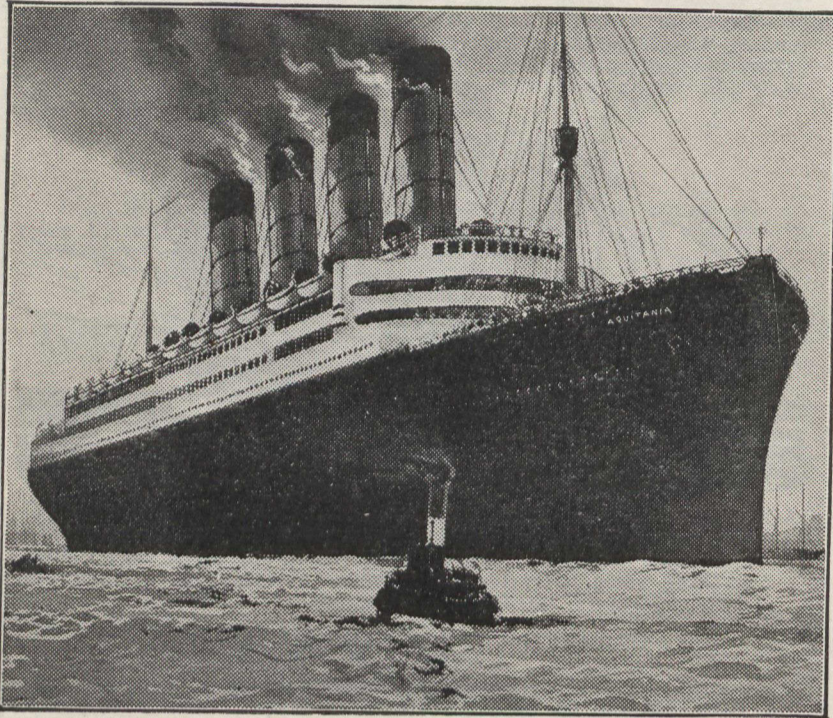


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leaving only the memory of a dream. Now she was awake, and the sweet odours of opening buds were in her nostrils; the wind, freighted with the warm spring sunshine was in her face, the dazzling blue of the cloudless sky was in her eyes. Now she was awake, awake to the danger of the grim, green hurrying water behind her; awake to the cracking of the ice field upon which she floated; awake to the piling jam behind there in the Narrows, soon to break and come racing and roaring down upon her. Now she was awake, and she was afraid. Life was sweet. Life was love, and she wanted to live. She lifted herself to her knees and prayed aloud. Then she opened her eyes, and looked back to her husband.

He was down at the bank in front of their cabin now. What was he doing! What madness! No boat could reach her in time, and there was a backward journey against that wild current! She screamed aloud to try and dissuade him, but the wind laughed in her face, carrying her voice back and back over the floating ice-field. She saw him push the boat down the bank and into the water. She saw him spring in, grasp the oars and pull out straight towards the opposite shore, the current carrying the boat steadily down towards the ice.

On and on, the ice floe swept, quietly now, as the river steadily widened, and after it came the boat, gaining slowly but surely under the powerful strokes that had behind them all of Jem's great strength of body, of mind, and of soul.

SHE watched, hands clenched until the nails pierced her palms and the slowly oozing blood clotted between her fingers. He must reach her, he should reach her. The very force of her love was bringing him to her. Not for an instant did her eyes leave the white drawn face in the boat. And neither the man nor the woman saw the great wall of ice at the Narrows piling and breaking, piling and breaking, until it was like a white mountain blocking the river.

"Jem," Mrs. Harkins called. He could hear her now and he lifted his haggard face and smiled upon her. "Jem, you can do it. Oh, Jem, God help you, you can do it!"

Again he bent his head, and pulled with stern strength against the current.

Now he was almost opposite her. A few more steady strokes and he swung the boat around letting the current carry him, while springing to his feet he seized the pike. When he felt the boat strike, he steadied it, holding it off by pressing the pike against the ice.

"Now, Essie," he said hoarsely.

She crawled over the few yards of ice between them, and half fell into the boat. She took the pike from Jem, holding it firmly until he could get the oars, then she crouched down on the seat facing her husband.

There were no oars except those that Jem was using, and as, little by little, her husband pulled away from the ice, Mrs. Harkins looked past him to the white wall, three miles back there at the Narrows, a wall whose outline kept changing every moment as if behind it the mad river of ice were trying to crash through the barrier or to leap above it.

A terrible fear laid hold of the woman. Again her eyes sought her husband's face and the newly-awakened love in her heart, and the horror of that awful death that soon must come bearing down upon them, made her want to go to Jem, to cling to him, to hold her cheek against his white, drawn face, to meet what was inevitable with Jem's arms tight around her. Of what use to struggle with the shore so far away and the current beating them back. She sobbed aloud, and her husband jerked his head up sharply and looked at her. Again, he smiled, and the tenderness that lightened his worn face was sweeter than a caress.

"Jem," she whispered, and she hooked her little blood-stained hands tightly together and leaned forward, her soul in her eyes.

The man seemed to work with renewed energy. He bent his head down again, pulling, straining against

the fierce rush of water, and little by little, inch by inch, the shore grew nearer, the ice-floe farther away.

They were opposite Lipscome's place now. Three men came running down to the shore, and a woman hurried out of the cabin, a shawl pinned over her head.

The sun was setting. The wind grew suddenly chill. A flock of ptarmigan flew in a little cloud from over the Narrows, down the river, and then hovering above the boat, turned and sailed inland, vanishing over the hills.

Jem drew his lip under his teeth, and bent almost double as he worked at the oars.

Now the men on shore started to run down the bank, keeping pace with the boat. The woman followed. Their shouts came clearly, cheerily across the water.

A hundred yards from the bank, and going steadily nearer, Mrs. Harkins' heart was beating high in her throat. She knew Jem could hear it, just as she could hear the whistling of his breath.

Fifty yards! Life and love were waiting over there on the shore. Forty yards! Surely they had left death behind them. Thirty yards! Oh God! of thy great goodness! Twenty yards!

Hark! Was that a thunderbolt out of heaven or the beginning of the end of all the world. Mrs. Harkins stared behind, her eyes dilated, her bloodless lips apart.

The jam had broken and was bearing down upon them.

On it came, thousands of tons of crashing, pounding, cracking ice, uprooted trees and broken scows, and the water churning among it hissed and snarled like a living thing.

Jem did not turn his head, only his face grew whiter, and his breath whistled more sharply as he drew it gaspingly in. The boat was ten feet from the bank.

With fascinated eyes the woman watched the oncoming flood. The end was near, nearer, nearer. It was upon them. A great horned piece of the ice-floe reared itself out of the water, and crashed down beside the boat, and a vast blackness spread over all the world.

It was night, starlit and still, and the Yukon flowed between its banks clear of ice, save for a few pieces that, left behind, went hurrying down, as if to try and overtake the flood. Close by a pile of cordwood on the bank a rowboat had been drawn up, a hole was in her side, and the handle of a broken oar still stuck in one row-lock.

A light burned in Lipscome's cabin, and around the stove inside Loony Mike and three other men talked in whispers, while a woman busied herself laying a table.

"It was a miracle," Tom Lipscome said for the twentieth time. "Don't tell me it wasn't. If that there piece of ice hadn't just naturally pushed the boat ashore Jem Harkins wouldn't have cut another stick of cordwood on the river."

"If you fellows hadn't been there to haul it in the boat would have been swamped anyway," Mrs. Lipscome said quietly. "There's a hole in her side as big as that window."

"WELL, I'm glad we cheated the Yukon," Loony Mike said. "If it was only for that little woman's sake. She's got more grit than any man in the Klondyke, let alone a female. Why she just naturally took that rope and pushed it over Jess' head and saw her dragged to safety, while she went sailin' down river on the ice-floe, without a word, an' a smile on her lips that like to broke me all up."

Upstairs in the loft Mrs. Harkins lay on the bunk; a candle stuck on a shelf over the bed sent a warm, soft gleam of light over her loose dark hair, her parted lips, and her shining eyes. Jem, utterly exhausted, knelt beside her, his arms around her, his head on her breast.

"Essie," he whispered, "the little box is safe. I put it in the cache up at my cabin."

"Never mind, dear," she whispered back, and she tightened her arms about him, "I have all I want here."