

# BLUE BOOK

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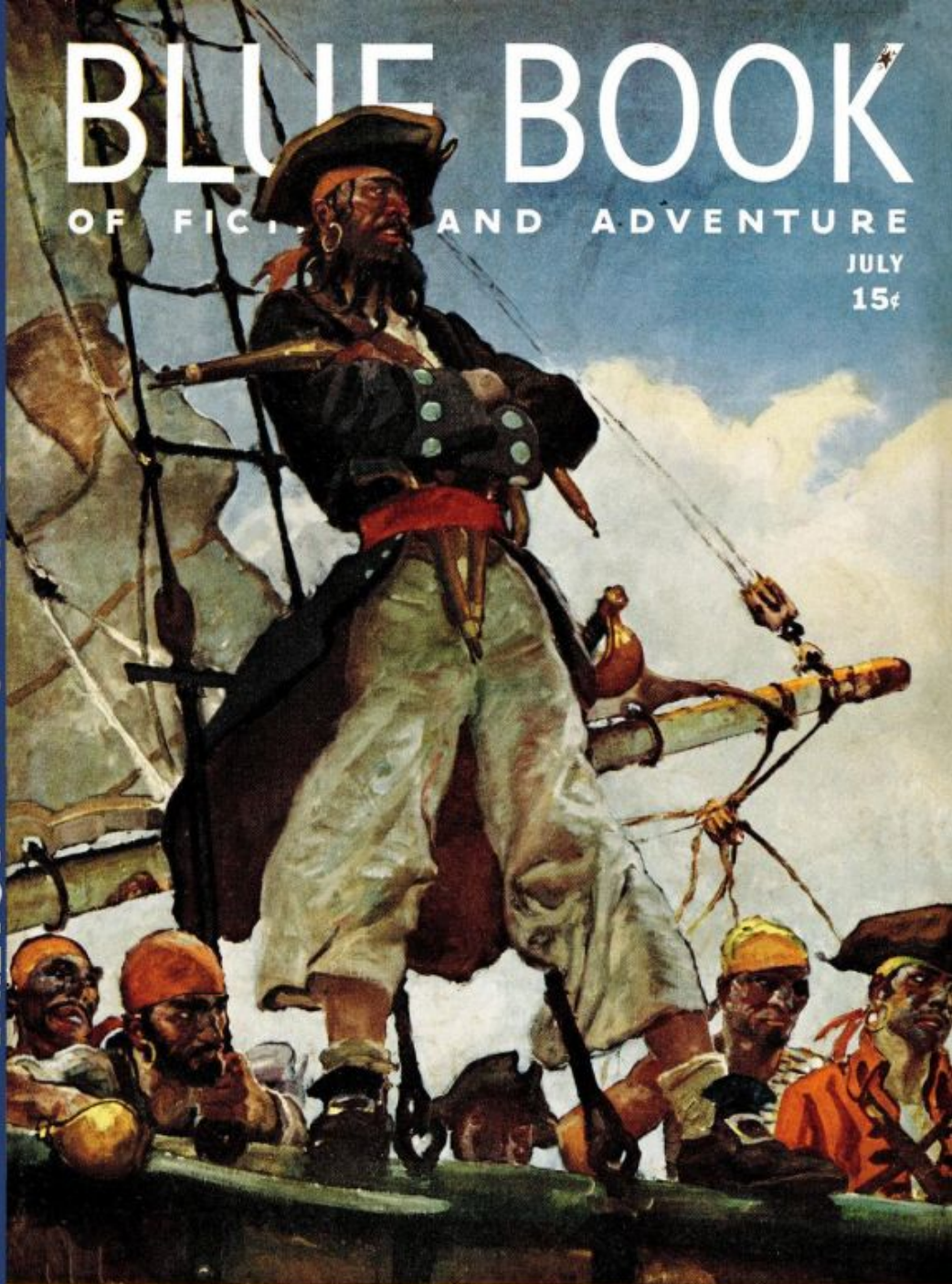
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H. BEDFORD-JONES • FULTON GRANT • GORDON KEYNE

*Painted by HERBERT MORTON STOOPS to illustrate "THE DEVIL IS DEAD"*

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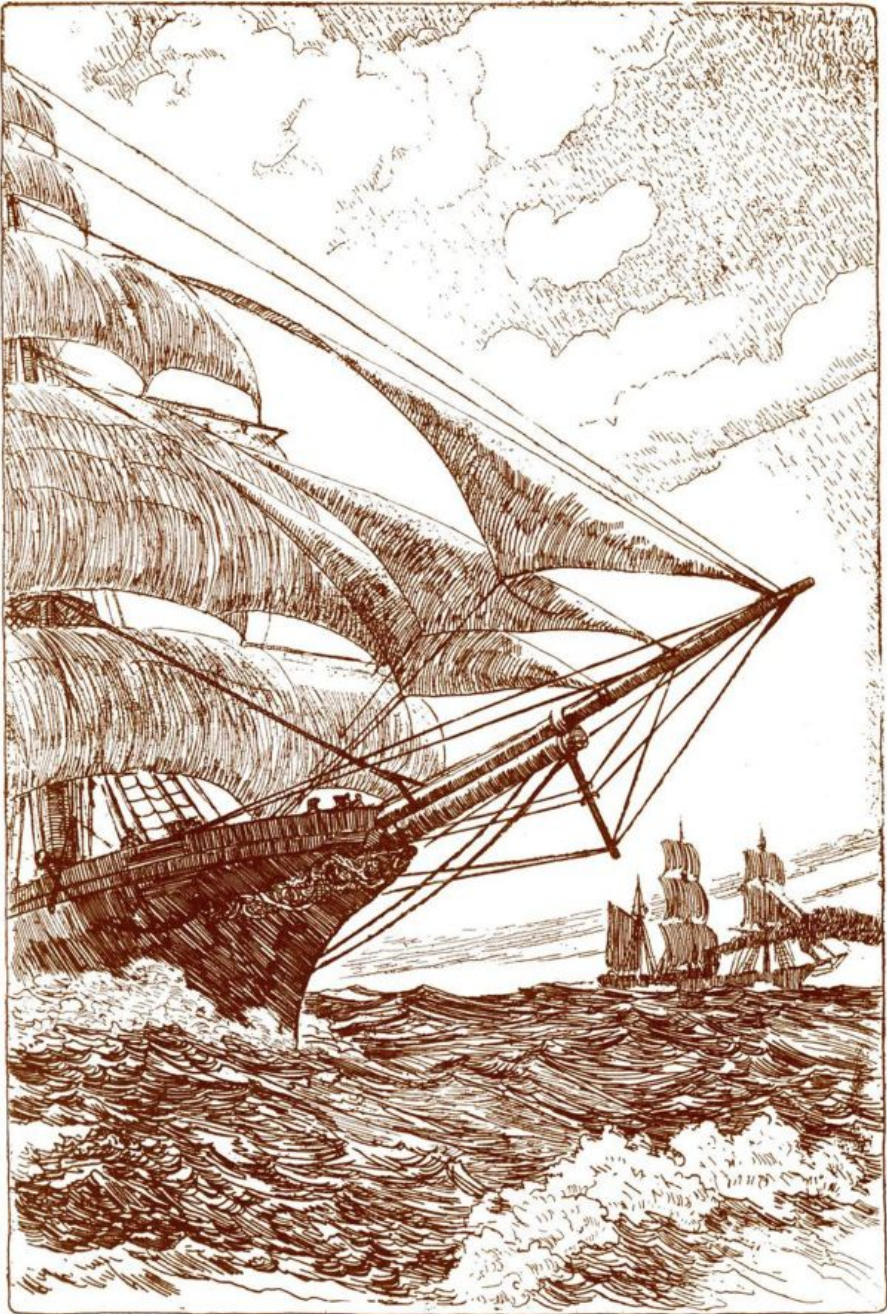
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**Almost neck and neck, they raised the bold headland of Cape Frio.... Then it was crack on all sail, stoke the fireboxes, and race for the entrance!**



*A race around the world—newfangled steam against sail; and the devil take the hindmost. The thirty-first story in the “Ships and Men” series.*

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# Stormalong

By H. BEDFORD-JONES  
and CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

Captain L. B. Williams is a pseudonym of Henry Bedford-Jones.

Illustrated by George Avison

First published *Blue Book*, July 1939.

Jack Rankin was a hard man, tall, frosty-eyed and short-tempered. “Stormalong” Rankin, they called him, and for reason aplenty. He drove his ship by the shortest distance between two points, and be damned to wind, weather or human life; but that made owners’ profits and his own. Under him the *Naiad* was the fastest ship afloat, on the long haul.

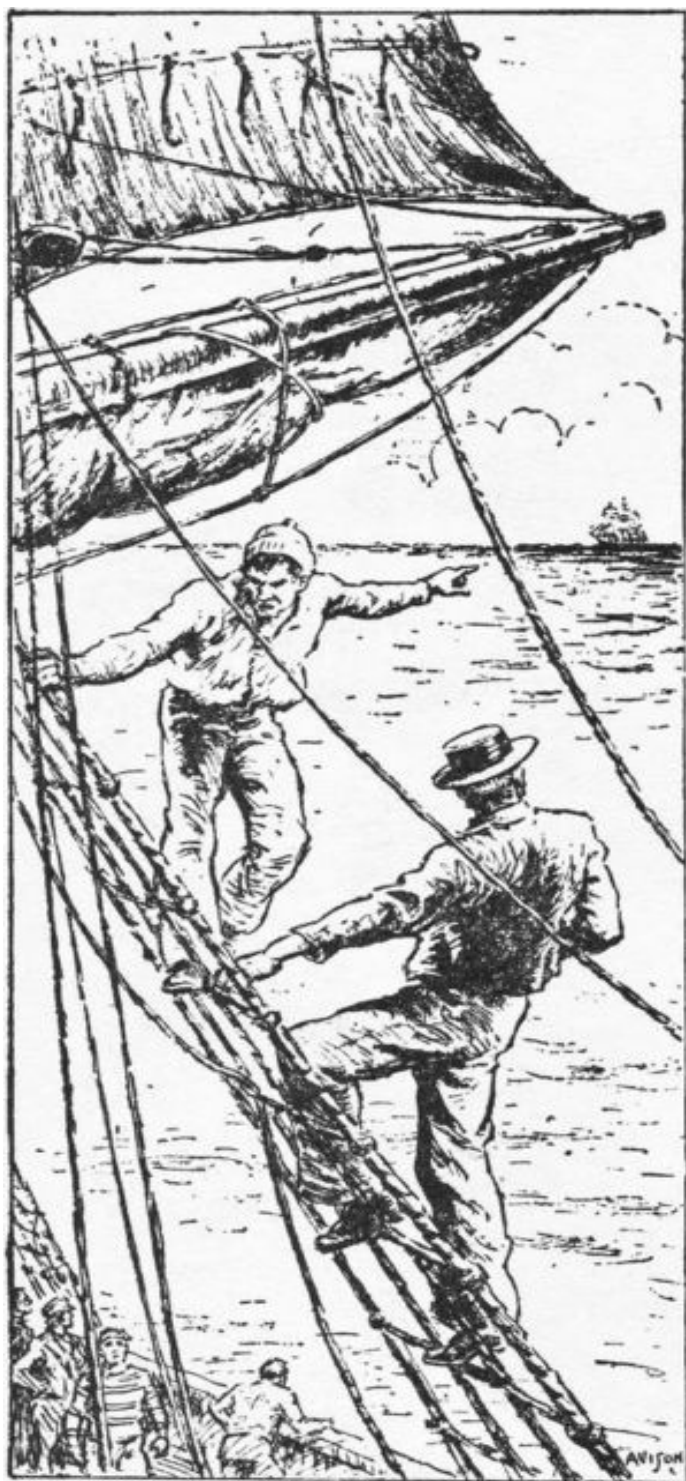
In those days men swore by all sorts of things, for the new things were unproven, and the old things wore well; Stormalong Rankin swore by sail and oaken bottom and clipper bow and a crew worked to the bone. He had no use for steam and paddles, for newfangled iron ships; and a large share of the world agreed with him. He could out sail any steamer going, and was not alone in that. Any good clipper ship could do the same.

Stormalong was no man to love, but he was a man who did things. When he walked into the Tontine House bar and found that Tommy Lund was made captain of the *Porpoise* and was posting a notice about letters for Canton,—all mail went from the Tontine House in those days,—he laughed long and loud.

“Why, Tommy was mate under me, and no damned good!” says he. “So it’s Cap’n Lund now, is it? Master of the *Porpoise* hybrid—square rig and paddle-boxes! Lord save us, what does he want with mail for Canton and the China Seas? Those new ships of iron can make no speed either by canvas or by steam! Knock a hole in ’em, and it’s like knocking a hole in a crockery teapot afloat in a tub! When’s Tommy pulling out?”

Somebody told him; they were crowded about him thick as flies, every one with an ax to grind, for Stormalong was a great man among shipping-men. Here in New York, where shipping was growing more important than along the New England coast, he could grant many a favor or pull many a rope.

“What?” he rapped out. “Two days ahead o’ me? Why, I’ll beat him to China and meet him outbound before he drops his Foochow pilot!”



**“It’s her! It’s her!” And the *Naiad* it was.**

Just then, in came Cap’n Lund. The two shook hands, with a deal of apparently good-natured talk and hearty words and back-slapping; and indeed Lund was a man of great good humor. A big fellow, unruffled and easy in his ways, with a wide, generous mouth and a cautious eye. None of your dandies like Stormalong; no attempt to impress the world with his explosive energy, by dint of heady oaths and hot barking words.

He leaned over the bar, and the two had a drink together; and he shook his head slowly when Stormalong rallied him about his hybrid tub on a China voyage.

“True enough,” said he in his calm way. “But you and I are different, Cap’n Rankin; and owners are different, and ships are different. You’re running for tea and a record passage and crack on everything! Quick results and quick profits.”

“Aye, and results show,” said Stormalong.

“My owners are a new outfit,” went on Lund. “No tea for us, no racing and killing crews; make haste slowly—that’s the word. Cargo space and safety. And at that, we’ll make a fast passage.”

“With engines and coal to lug, and an iron bottom?” The derisive laughter of Stormalong lifted high and sharp. “Not a chance, Cap’n Lund, not a chance!”

“Would you come along to the Brooklyn yards and look over the *Porpoise*?” Lund rolled an inquiring, amiable eye. “There’s a new idea or two going into her.”

Stormalong looked at his fat gold watch, and nodded; and they went off together. The men at the bar looked after them, and one nudged another:

“There goes the devil, and polite as could be!”

“Ah, but Tommy Lund’s no fool,” said the other. . . .

He was no fool, indeed; still, he scarcely reckoned what evil could fill a man’s heart, himself being without envy and malice. Captain Rankin had discharged him as mate, railing at him for a slow stick and a softy unable to work the crew properly; and any man who wrongs another comes to hate that other. Lund was, in reality, anxious to win the esteem and admiration of Stormalong; but when they came to look over the rebuilt *Porpoise* as she took in cargo, even his well-argued convictions were shaken by the positive, aggressive derision of Rankin.

“Nothing new about iron ships,” he said. “They’ve been tried out for years, and they’re coming into use more and more—”

“Ha!” broke in Stormalong. “They have their points, but they’re no good. Too heavy. Sails can’t drive ’em; your dinky engines can’t drive ’em. Takes too much coal to drive the blasted engines, and coal costs money. That eats up the profits. It’s been demonstrated over and over.”

“Sure,” admitted Cap’n Lund, rubbing his broad, smooth chin uneasily. “Sure. But this is different. She’s barque-rigged; we’ll use the paddle-wheels only to increase her speed and in emergencies.”

“Barque-rigged she is,” Stormalong agreed contemptuously. “Think of the *Naiad* with her canvas rising to heaven! Think of how she foams along! You’ll never equal her speed with this barque. Besides, what have you got under your feet? An iron pot, that’s all. Strike a spike of coral, and she’ll sink before you can get your pumps greased!”

“No, no, Stormalong!” protested Cap’n Lund, and pointed to the ship, whose holds were fast filling. “Something new there. A double bottom, against just such an emergency; more, the holds are divided off into compartments by bulkheads.”



“What?” rasped Stormalong. “Bulkheads? Never heard of such a thing!”

“You will in future. Suppose the worst happens, a hole punched in her side or even an outbreak of fire. That compartment is closed off by iron doors. The water can’t spread. The fire can’t spread. Why, it’ll change all shipbuilding!”

Stormalong uttered a roaring laugh.

“Hark, my lad! Theories are all very fine, and not worth a damn. Double bulkheads and a double hull—that’d be better yet, eh? Weight! There’s your answer. To make this weight forge through the water at even six knots, you’d need double engines and ten times the canvas!”

---

Lund’s blue eyes took on an anxious, doubtful look. Cap’n Rankin pointed now to the forward deck with its pronounced camber, with its iron rails instead of the usual bulwarks.

“Look there! Your hands will be awash like a halftide rock all the time!” he exclaimed in scorn. “No bulwarks at all to fend off the seas!”

“Nor to hold ’em aboard.” Lund brightened a trifle. “There’s no earthly reason for bulwarks, except old custom. And there’s every reason against them. Think of your own *Naiad*! Her deck’s like a swimming-pool half the time; when she gets a bit of a list, the load of water tends to keep her from righting. But here—well, the *Porpoise* will deserve her name in heavy weather. The water will be gone as soon as it comes aboard.”

“And your men washed away with it,” Stormalong rasped. “No, no! You’ve got a crazy thing here. Not to mention the compass trouble in an iron ship.”

“That’ll be taken care of, never fear.”

“Aye, I’ve been aboard iron ships before this, my lad; I know all about your deviation figuring and so forth,” stormed on Cap’n Rankin contemptuously. (And months later, Lund was to recall this remark at a bad moment.) “What’s this I hear about you being bound for Chefoo? Thought it was Canton?”

“No; the orders are to make Chefoo first,” said Lund. “A lot of coal to unload there.”

“Why, I’m making Chefoo first myself!” Rankin exclaimed, staring.

Lund broke into a hearty laugh.

“Not first, Cap’n! Not ahead of me, anyhow.”

“You don’t seriously expect to equal my time outward bound?”

“No; I should beat it easily,” Lund said amiably. “Your fastest day’s run isn’t your average, by a good deal; but my average will be brought up to a steady mark, thanks to the engines. You know the old fable about the tortoise and the hare.”

“Aye, and I know the sea, and I know folly from wisdom, and I’ll put a thousand dollars on it!” Rankin cried. “A thousand or ten thousand on clipper bow against straight stem, on fact against untried theory!”

Tommy Lund was easy-going, slow to wrath, never a man to wager; but the rasping voice and the edged words got under his skin. It is a hard thing to chart a clear course against headwinds of derision.

Hot words went to worse, and caution plunged overboard. There on the wharf the bets were made—money in the bank, master’s share of the forthcoming voyage, credit pledged and reputation at stake. Old Israel Long, one of Cap’n Lund’s owners, came up in time to write down and witness the bets. He pleaded against the folly, but it was hot blue eyes against lurid black ones, with hatches ripped off old dislikes, a crowd ringing in the two captains and eager voices whooping up the bets. No backing out now, and devil take the loser!

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Both ships were to sail in two days. The two captains, impressive in their blue broadcloth, their stovepipe hats, calmed down and shook hands and smiled at parting. Old Israel Long, standing at Cap'n Lund's elbow and watching Stormalong stride off with a gang of admirers at his heels, groaned under his breath.

"Thomas, Thomas, you're a terrible fool for taking chances!" said he, shaking his head anxiously. "There's many a mishap in a long voyage."

"Poor seamanship, many mishaps," said Cap'n Lund tersely.



**The deviation-card was gone! Lund darted for the deck.**

"Tut-tut! The point is, man, your ship's not proven. Stormalong may be right about the weight; if so, where are you?" Old Israel wagged his head again. "Proud of your iron ships and engines, aye! But pride's a mortal bad thing at times."

Damn all croaking! Lund tried desperately to forget the words, and could not.

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The two craft got away the second morning at ebb-tide, with a brisk sou'-wester blowing. This meant head-winds for the sailing-vessel; but the *Porpoise*, spouting black smoke, paddled out into the East River and headed for the Narrows. As she passed Gibbet Island,

where pirates had once hung in chains, the foremast lookout reported the *Naiad* under way, but not following the steamer.

Stormalong Rankin, instead, was heading through Hell Gate with everything set to the sou'-wester.

Lund, pacing the quarterdeck, felt a thrill of admiration for the man. Only supreme seamanship could work such a large vessel safely through Hell Gate; even the Sound was not exactly comfortable for a square-rigger in a gale. But he knew Rankin would win to sea around Block Island, and be on equal terms when they started the long leg down to Rio.

Holding within sight of each other almost every day, the two ships made good runs to the equator, crossed, and picked up the fresh southeast trades. Neither skipper was doing any pushing. Lund spent long days getting his deviation-card in shape, with scrupulous exactness.

With a hull and engines of iron, which readily take on magnetism and themselves become magnets, every projecting point about the vessel became a pole of these projected magnets. He knew the danger here. On the different directions of the ship's head, these various projections changed position relative to the compass needle, which was affected by the dominant force. Thus, for each heading, was a different deviation.

Determining these deviations by observations, tabulating them, testing them repeatedly, Lund finally finished the job. With a deep breath of relief, he at last tacked his deviation-card to the inside of the chart locker door, handy for applying the readings when he laid off his course. It was done, and well done!

So was the first leg of the voyage. Almost neck and neck, they raised the bold headland of Cape Frio, forty-four days from New York; then it was crack on all sail, stoke the fireboxes, and race for the entrance!

The sea breeze ended with ebbing day, however. When Lund made the entrance islands of Pai and Mai, the *Naiad* was far to the rear, her canvas flapping dismally; and there she was forced to anchor all night. The *Porpoise*, her paddles threshing mightily, churned past Sugar Loaf to port, answered the hails of Fort Santa Cruz to starboard, and dropped anchor below Cobras Isle, where the port doctor came aboard. The first leg was won.

With daybreak, the land breeze was striking off with strong gusts, with squalls of wind and rain and peals of thunder. Half an hour passed, then an hour; and out of the storm-wrack loomed a tall ship coming in under topsails and reefed foresail. Word of the race and the wagers had by this time spread through all the assembled ships and along the waterfront; when Stormalong brought his vessel to anchor, a burst of cheers from the *Porpoise* was echoed from the harbor.

Nothing lost, nothing won; after four days the anchors were weighed together, and both ships passed out to sea and headed on down the long reach south.

Off the Plate River they ran into a strong pampero. Severely battered, and pushed far out to sea, they were separated and lost to sight of each other. After passing the parallel of 40 S., however, Lund one morning picked up the *Naiad's* canvas. He laughed softly to himself, and served out extra grog with a glad hand. He had not pushed things a bit, but he had picked up that lordly craft handily; this told him all he needed to know.

They hung in company now, preparing for heavy weather off the Cape; the best canvas was bent; new running-gear was rove; thick clothing was broken out. And ahead was coming the first test. Lund made ready for it coolly, methodically.

They had a brush with a twister off Patagonia, but stayed together to the Falklands, and thence to Staten Island, lying east of Tierra del Fuego. And there came separation; the

*Porpoise*, under easy canvas and spouting smoke, steamed boldly for the strait of Le Maire.

Stormalong Rankin luffed up and hesitated, as he watched his rival head for the inward passage. For once, however, prudence ruled his action. Baffling winds, treacherous currents, tremendous rises and falls of tide, denied those iron straits to him. With an oath he filled away and headed around the Cape.

Before evening he caught it, as mist raced down from the southwest. All hands were frantically summoned, light sails clewed up and handed, topsail halyards let to by the run, reef tackles hauled out, buntlines and spilling-lines bowsed tight. With a blast of sleet like grapeshot, the gale burst.

Gale followed gale as the days passed. It was three full weeks ere Rankin could work up into the meridian of 80 W. and into fair winds. Then, with all the canvas she could stagger under, the *Naiad* bore for Valparaiso.

And all this while the *Porpoise* had been aground off Punta Arenas.

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When Lund came into Valparaiso harbor, he was in despair, had completely given up hope. When he learned, from the bumboatmen who came aboard, that the *Naiad* had left port a fortnight earlier, he plucked up heart. A lead of two weeks was bad, yes, but he knew his Pacific; he had been all the while gambling on the Pacific, and the long stretch to the Sandwich Islands, and the longer one beyond. Many a time had he made the run to Chefoo and Canton, and only once had he gone bowling ahead with never a bad break to stay his ship. This time he was prepared for breaks.

He put in to anchorage and began to discharge mails and cargo. Going ashore with the port doctor, Lund was greeted on the pier by a smiling Chileño who announced himself as a runner from the Old House at Home, a sailors' boardinghouse at the foot of Maintop Hill, close to the waterfront.

"What's this?" growled Lund as the man handed him a dirty envelope.

"It's known you were coming, Cap'n Lund. Two men have been in jail for the past few days; they paid me to watch for you."

Lund tore open the envelope and took out a letter, crudely scrawled in pencil:

*Captain Lund of the Porpoise.*

*Sir and good friend to sailermen:*

*We be two hands in Jale here. The sojers treat us terble. Work all day and bean soup with no beans. Black bred and coffee which aint coffee. We be starving and dying from hard work and no food. We skipped from the Rainbow ship but we beg to God that Captain Lund will bale us out and will work our heads off if he helps us leeve this dam hole which aint fitten for american sailer men. Respkfully,*

*Sam Peak  
Hook Avery.*



**“I’ve wished for this day!” said Lund . . . and smacked his fist into the dark face.**

Lund smiled grimly as he stuffed the letter into a pocket. He had been a foremast hand; he knew how easy it was for a seaman to get into jail in South American ports. And several men were sick aboard, too weak to work; he could use two good hands.

He went about his shore business, taking no end of chaffing from the consul and others. Stormalong Rankin had done a lot of bragging upon unexpectedly finding himself ahead of the *Porpoise* after all; and news of the sail-steam race was everywhere. Upon learning from a consul that the *Rainbow*, a Canton-bound clipper, had actually been here and gone a few days since, Lund arranged for the release of the two seamen in question, conditional on his getting them out of Valparaiso at once.

He went to the *carcel* and was admitted by a surly police official. In the patio of the jail he halted to await his men. They were in plain sight. At the far end of the rectangular jail yard was a medieval treadmill. Working this full steam, pumping water for the day’s use, were a score of seamen.

The officer rapped out an order and the mill stopped turning. Twenty ragged, emaciated, woebegone seamen of all colors and nationalities stared hopefully; two names were called; and two men, bearded and unkempt, stepped down from the torture-wheel. Another order, and the others resumed their weary journey to nowhere.

The two half-starved figures stumbled forward with wild words of rejoicing. Lund broke in upon them gruffly.

“Get your gear, if you have any, and report aboard the *Porpoise*. Never mind any thanks. Get going.”

It was evening before he came aboard himself, and spoke with the mate.

“Did those two rascals come aboard?”

“Aye, sir. Reg’lar packet-rats and no mistake. Scum, but they work willing.”



“Give ’em slops and put ’em at easy work. When they get some meat on their bones, turn ’em over to the engineer; he needs some more help in the stokehole.”

The two were fed and clothed from the slop-chest and set to work. They worked with pathetic eagerness; and presently Captain Lund forgot the whole matter.

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Now, heading north, he drove the *Porpoise* for all she was worth. Next port of call was Acapulco, the galleon port of Manila ships. Ten days behind, there; he was gaining a bit, better than he had expected.

Off again in record time, every man aboard throwing himself into the work with vim and energy. On across the Pacific, with the northeast trades blowing them toward the Sandwich Islands. Not until Honolulu, which although not the capital of the islands was the harbor most frequented by ships, would they know how far behind they were.

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The morning they stood in past Diamond Head, Lund was nervously pacing the deck; and the crew was on high tension. And there, slap before them, was the *Naiad* at anchor. One almost incredulous look, a yell from the man aloft, and then wild cheers burst from the whole ship. Lund flushed happily, exultation in his heart. Caught her, by the Eternal! But the strain had told on him, and he was weary of it.

Ashore, the two skippers met, shook hands, laughed together.

“What happened to you?” inquired Lund. “You led me handsomely at Valparaiso.”

Stormalong, who was immaculately tricked out in his best shore rig, grimaced but seemed not at all cast down. “Head-winds, where the trades should have been, for one thing,” he rejoined philosophically. “A touch of bad luck, that’s all. I haven’t begun to fight yet, Cap’n. The pull will come from here on to Chefoo.”

Lund nodded.

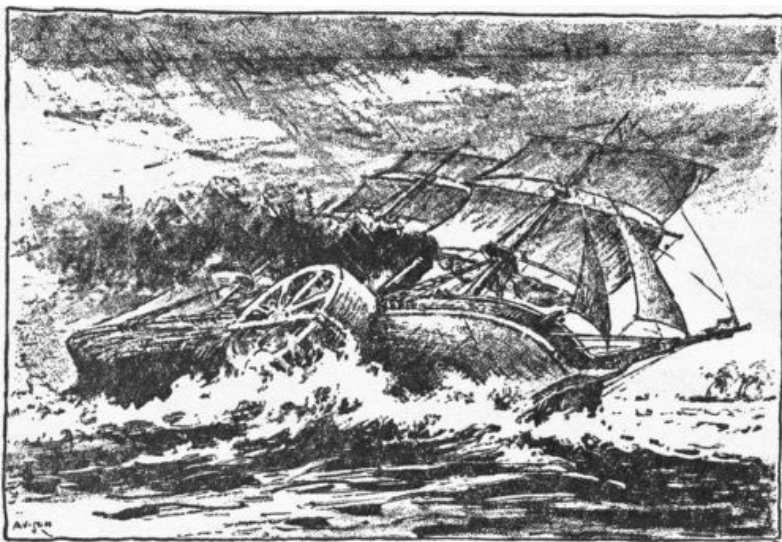
“If you want it so, yes. But it’s my race. Say the word, and we’ll call off the bets. I’ve proved my points; my ship’s got the heels of you; and when we strike the China sea it’ll be typhoon season. Say the word, and the race is off.”

Rankin’s face darkened ominously under a rush of blood.

“Whining, are you?” he rapped out. “Trying to crawl out of it, you dog! Not much; save your fine words for the owners. I’ll beat you and your misbegotten iron pot to Chefoo, and you’ll pay through the nail. Good-by, and bad luck to you!”

He swung off and away, leaving Lund astounded by this revelation of snarling hostility. Until this moment, he had never regarded Stormalong as an actual enemy; he had never thought Stormalong so regarded him. He had not viewed the race, indeed, in any light of personal vindictiveness. But now his eyes were open.

He went back to the ship with a blaze in his heart and a blaze in his face and summoned the mate, an angular Yankee with a reputation as tough as his hard-bitten features.



“Push everything,” he said savagely. “No shore leave!”

“Aye?” said the mate in sour surprise. “By rights we’d be here a week at the least, with the gear to overhaul—”

“You heard me, Mister!” snapped Lund. “When does the *Naiad* pull out?”

“Day after tomorrow, I hear.”

“Then we sail the morning after she does. See to it.”

---

As ordered, so done. The men grumbled, cursed; but the driving mate got his overhaul done, preparing for the long beat to the China coast. Lund himself inspected the hatches and holds where the coal and the cargo for Chefoo and Shanghai was stowed; the possibility of fire by spontaneous combustion was always a specter to dread. All was well; the hatches were battened, and the *Porpoise* put to sea one day behind Rankin in the *Naiad*.

And now it was drive with a vengeance, and a thousand leagues passing under the forefoot—with never a sign of the towering windjammer. Outwardly calm, Lund paced the quarterdeck with uneasy heart. The weather was too steady altogether. If Rankin were bowling along day after day with all canvas drawing, he would walk away with the race. Yet this was unlikely: some days were fast; some were slow; some would be sheer exasperation of light shifting winds, if the average held true. But to the slower *Porpoise* the long run should mean victory, with the paddles to churn where the wind failed, as now and then it did.

The long leagues slid away with the passing days. And then suddenly, unexpectedly, as Lund and the mate were coming up to take noon sights, with the dangerous Chusan archipelago ahead, a cry droned down from the man aloft:

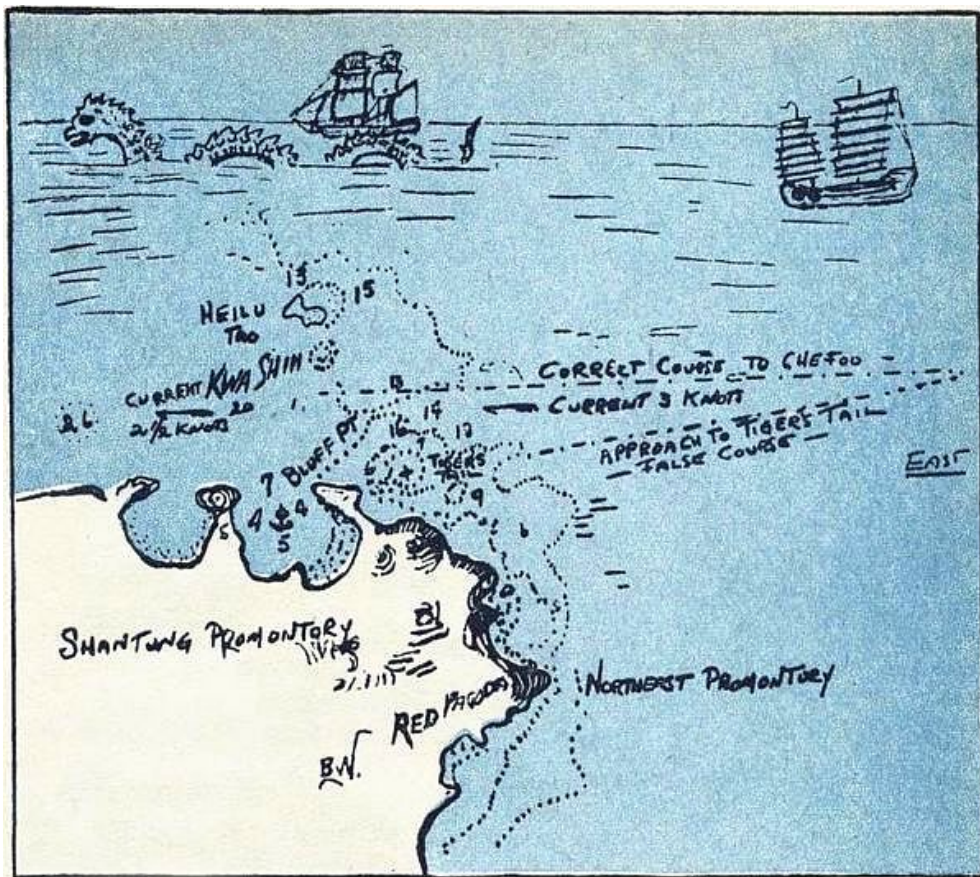
“Sa-a-il ho! Sail ho! A point off the sta’board bow!”

Lund seized his glass and leaped for the mizzen shrouds. From aloft, came an excited yell, even before he was sure of the white dot breaking the horizon.

“It’s her! It’s her!”

The *Naiad* it was, with the wind failing to light, baffling airs; and Lund’s heart hammered to the cheers of the men.

But the wind picked up, and the tall clipper clung like a leech now, sometimes hull down, sometimes with her courses rising, sometimes out of sight but ever forging into view again. It was going to be a finish fight; this was certain. And then, hauling up for the northeast promontory of Shantung,—the finish almost in view,—came the final gamble.



Since early morning a half-gale had been blowing. Lund, impelled to caution in these waters, furlled everything but jibs and upper topsails. About meridian the *Naiad* began to walk up; with every stitch of canvas bellying taut, she drew up and passed the *Porpoise* at a good fifteen-knot clip. Lund nodded to the pleading look of the Yankee mate, and the lower topsails were spread; but Stormalong was in the lead now.

Thus, with night and the gale blowing up fresher, they drove in upon the fabled Wohushih, a snarling stretch of rocks and reefs lying off the promontory and stretching far out. The Tiger's Tail, it was called in general. Tiger's Tail Rock itself lay eight hundred yards off the head of the promontory; since it was awash at low water and clearly visible in a heavy sea, he had no misgivings. Junks beating up the coast for Chefoo and beyond never used the treacherous inside passage, for evil spirits dwelt there, and no sane seaman would tread upon the Tiger's Tail, as the proverb had it. A proverb as old as China itself, and this name was

probably as ancient too. Evil mists and sudden, unexplainable fogs imperiled all this place, and many a good ship's bones had been picked by the slavering fangs of the Tiger Rocks.

Stormalong Rankin bore straight on, and Lund grimly followed. There were no lights in those days, warding every headland and reef and danger-point on the coast; no warnings at all, but Rankin knew the passage, and so did Lund.

His last fix had shown him he should pass safely to the south of Heilu Tao and Kwa Shih, another nest of reefs and shoals stretching northwestward beyond the Tiger's Tail.

"Are ye going to chance it?" asked the mate, as Lund came from looking at the compass. "A tricky place, with false channels and overfalls and God knows what!"

Lund stopped before the wheel and stared straight ahead. The moon had risen, a pale disk affording just enough light to see surf breaking over a reef.

"Aye," he said. "If Stormalong gets through, we can. It'll save hours of sailing. It means winning or losing."

The mate muttered and went forward. Lund resumed pacing, now and again halting to take a bearing on the black bulk of the promontory looming off to port. At regular intervals the masthead lookout reported the position of the *Naiad*, and Lund altered course to keep in her track. Northeast Promontory appeared a little closer than it should be; but if Rankin could risk being set in close, so could he.

"What are ye getting for'ard?" sang out Lund to the leadsman, who had been taking a breather in the chains. The man took a cast, and cried out:

"Quarter less three, sir, and shoaling fast!"

Lund sprang to the bell-cord that signaled the engines, and jerked it. The paddles ceased slapping; straining forward, Lund stood listening intently. He knew the locality, knew the chart by heart, and was sure he could peg his position within a few hundred yards.

This, at sea, is plenty of room, but can mean tragedy in narrow waters. Lund turned and leaped suddenly for the chartroom. The devil! He had forgotten—

At the chart locker, he groped blindly. Struck a match, looked, groped again. No sign of it. The tack was gone; the deviation-card was gone! With one wild oath, Lund darted for the deck again. The mate had set the course here—

"Mister! Ah, here you are!" he broke out, as the gangling figure loomed. "When you set this course did you check by the deviation-card?"

"No! The card was plumb gone—I thought you had it."

Then came the lookout's stunning cry:

"Breakers ahead! Breakers!"

"All hands, Mister."

The moment bulked long; an eternity. Lund realized that he had been led into a trap. Off somewhere to starboard in the mist sounded the slatting of canvas, the clattering of yards and blocks, the unmistakable thunder of backed topsails, hoarse orders to let go both anchors, and the heavy splashes as they fell.

Lund cursed hotly, striving to keep panic from his voice, lifted a shout at the mate, who was getting the anchors cleared forward.

"Let go both anchors when you're ready! Bear a hand!"

Getting out those heavy hooks was no simple task. The men labored mightily, but there was scant time. Lund gritted his teeth. Stormalong had rigged his anchors out long ago—had schemed all this!



All in a moment, a long, long moment; the gale was high, but the mists were thinning in the wind. Suddenly off to starboard loomed a small, flat-topped island. Lund choked on the recognition. They were inside Heilu Tao, a mile north of Bluff Point—actually treading on the Tiger’s Tail!

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Worried, incredulous and puzzled, Lund glanced into the binnacle. Then the dreaded cry from both masthead and the mate on the fo’c’sle head:

“Breakers ahead and on the port bow!”

It all cleared, windy sea and brain together, at the tag end of that frightful moment. The mists vanished. There was the *Naiad*, long bowsprit pointed in the opposite direction, heading into the wind, breasting the tide and overfalls with both anchor-cables taut as bars. Trap or not, Stormalong had come within a hair’s-breadth of putting his own ship on the rocks, for the tide raced at full flood.

Lund, aware of his ship being pushed relentlessly, went forward on the jump. He had clear vision now; one glance from the knighthead, and he swung around.

“Belay the anchors but stand by,” he ordered the mate, and lifted his speaking trumpet at the second officer, aft.

“Hard up the helm! Port—hard over!”

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Here, providentially, was a channel opening—a close shave, but it could be done. He ordered full speed, the paddles began thrashing; to his horror, the *Naiad* was blotted out again as the mist came swirling down. He raced aft.

The *Porpoise*, her stack emitting black streamers of smoke that were whipped to ribbons in the wind, thrashed into the narrow gut. She made it, with only feet to spare; the mist whirled thick and thicker. Then a wild cry from the mate.

“Breakers ahead and on the sta’board bow!”

The ship was flying with wind and sea dead astern. There was no sea-room to go about. Astern, the surf thundered.

“Full speed astern! Let go both anchors!” roared Lund, and groaned to himself.

A booming swell rolled up and lifted the vessel like a chip. She struck, she staggered; even the roar of surf was drowned by the grinding of the reef against her iron bottom. Another swell—the screech of scraping iron sounded anew. Then she was floating, listless, all way stopped. The anchors plunged down.

The second mate, the hands who had been working sail and tending yards, left the rigging and gathered in a mute group on the halfdeck. The mate came aft. Lund was calm now, despite the cold sweat on his forehead.

“Furl all sail,” he ordered. “Where’s Chips? Sound the well. Unlimber the pumps.”

He waited, watching the drift of mist all around, until the carpenter came with his soundings.

“Wells are dry, sir!”

Lund, with one deep breath, relaxed.

“Your watch, Mister,” he said to the mate. “That double bottom may have weight, but it’s proved its worth once more. Wake me up at any alarm.”

He went below. Nothing to do now until daylight, when he could determine how completely he was trapped. He could not understand it. His bearings were all off—the mist had ruined his perception, and loss of the deviation-card when it was most needed had put the

skids under him completely. To remember the deviations offhand was impossible. He searched the chart locker again, searched everywhere, and found no card. Weary and dismal of heart, he turned in to await daylight.

Morning showed the ship lying among rocks, anchored and riding safely; but one look at the gut through which he had come, and Lund swallowed hard. It was incredible that he should have made that narrow passage in safety. By daylight, he never would have attempted it; last night, he had thought he was on a clear course. There was no clear course at all, in sight. Northward, the surf broke over a curving reef that completely cut him off from the open sea beyond.

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Around the end of the Tiger's Tail the *Naiad* was ratching by means of kedges. Lund watched her, too thankful that his ship was saved, to think about losing the game. Then he turned his glass to the reef on the north side, and examined it with attention. The tide was coming in heavily. He knew where he was, now; he knew every depth of water, even the depth over that reef. If he went at it, the double bottom would be torn clean out of his ship—and he had almost gone at it last night.

"Nothing to do," he said to the mate, "except to work back through the gut and take the long way around. You haven't found that deviation-card?"

The mate worked his lean jaws on a twist of tobacco.

"Well," he said, "I've got my suspicions, and they aint nice. If you was to tell me to foller my own nose—"

"Run 'em down, Mister." Lund gave him a sharp glance. "If you think there was anything — Hello! What's Stormalong up to?"

His attention was suddenly diverted. Under light, uneven airs the *Naiad* had worked around the island and the reef, but instead of bearing up for Chefoo, had rounded up and was dropping her longboat. Cap'n Rankin, resplendent in blue broadcloth and glossy high-topped beaver, descended into the boat and headed her in among the reef channels.

Lund watched the boat pull in. Presently Stormalong waved his hand, hailed them in greeting, and came in under the side. He clambered up to the deck, and stood looking around, saturnine, darkly handsome, powerful. The Yankee mate, who should have met him at the rail, had vanished completely. He strode aft to Lund, and with a grin shook hands.

"Well, well, Cap'n! You'll have a few days to study the Tiger's Tail, looks like. Maybe you can win back through the gut when the spring rise starts—it comes to seven and a half feet hereabouts. I thought I'd relieve you of the mails and anything else you might have to jettison to lighten ship."

Lund merely laughed slightly.

"Last time we met, Stormalong, I offered to cry quits on the wager. Now I'll offer to double it. Yes or no?"

Rankin shook his head, smiling shrewdly. "Tall talk, tall talk!" he said. "I suppose you'll be sailing right out?"

"Within the hour," said Lund. "And in Chefoo ahead of you."

"Right out, against the wind, eh?" Stormalong chuckled. "Paddles won't do it, Cap'n. You're too low in the water."

"Might be, if you were master," said Lund slowly. "That's the difference between us, Cap'n. Hello!"

The two men swung around. The Yankee mate was coming on the run. He was breathing hard, his eye was alight, and his skinned knuckles were bleeding. He paused to clutch the man Avery from amid a group of watching seamen, and shove him aft.

Stormalong Rankin stiffened a little.

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“I got it!” panted the mate, bringing Avery to a halt.

Lund’s brows lifted.

“What’s the meaning of this, Mister? What have you got?”

“A confession out o’ that blighter Sam Peak, what come aboard at Valparaiso! And here’s the other blighter. —You, Avery! Hand over that deviation-card! Quick, you dog, or I’ll put you in the sickbay!”

Avery shrank suddenly, white with panic. The angry mate reached for him, but with a subdued squawk, he produced the missing deviation-card.

“I found it, sir,”—and he shoved it at Lund. “I found it laying—”

“You lie!” roared the mate. “Cap’n Rankin give you money to lay for us and come aboard and rob us in a pinch! Sam Peak told the whole thing! Git! Down into Cap’n Rankin’s boat or I’ll take a rope to you!”

Lund fingered the card.

“Well, well! Mighty queer,” he said affably, “how things do come out—”

“What d’ye mean?” rapped out Stormalong suddenly. “I warn you, pay no attention to this outrageous lie! Don’t dare accuse me of trying to wreck your ship. Tell that to a Board of Inspectors back home, and they’ll snatch your ticket!”

Cap’n Tommy Lund smiled.

“I’m not telling anyone anything, Cap’n Rankin,” he answered cheerfully. “You’re a fine, clever, upstanding man, and many’s the time, aboard your ship, I’ve wished for this day to come.”

“What d’ye mean?” demanded Rankin truculently.

“Why, just this!” said Lund, and smacked his fist into the dark face.

Tommy Lund knew better than to bother hitting for the face if he meant to kill, but he just could not help it. Next instant, he regretted his mistake.

His regret did not last longer than it takes to get a black eye and a split lip, for he rallied and tore into Stormalong with both fists, while the yelling men formed a delighted roaring circle. True, Lund drew another black eye to match the first, but that was nothing at all to what Stormalong Rankin drew—absolutely nothing at all.

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Ten minutes later, beaver gone, blue coat in shreds, and a blob of gore where his handsome face had been, the sorry remains of Stormalong were handed down into his waiting boat, where his two jackals now crouched.

“A pleasant riddance to the lot of you,” sang out Lund from the rail. “Douse some water over your skipper and tell him to watch our smoke. Engineer! Steam up?”

“Aye, sir,” said the joyful engineer.

“Get below and give us a full head. Mister Mate! Get in them anchors—all hands to stations! Make sail!”

One and all thought for certain that Tommy Lund had gone stark raving mad, but they yelped and obeyed him, swarming aloft. Steam or not, Cap’n Lund had never neglected sail

drill; and together, precisely, the topsails were shaken out, then the t'gallants and the courses. Navy style, and a sight to see!

Smoke poured from the stack of the *Porpoise*, for she had kept up full steam. The anchors were cat-headed, her canvas filled away, and with her twin paddles churning like mad, she presented her broad quarter to the breeze. Like mad, aye; Lund was at the helm, and a madman they all knew him.

For, with every stitch of canvas spread and the engines boiling, the *Porpoise* was heading slap for the reef across the bight.

“God help us!” said the mate, looking at Lund with stricken eyes. “There’s not above twelve feet o’ water yonder, and it’s steep-to both sides!”

“That’s what I figure,” said Lund, eyes bright on the reef. His voice blared, and the mate sprang to obey.

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Men leaped to tacks and sheets and braces, and the yards were sharply braced. The port, or lee, braces were hauled flat aft and bowsed taut. Then, at the very risk of taking the sticks out of her, Lund put his helm hard up, with the reef almost under her forefoot and men braced against the shock.

With the wind almost dead on the starboard beam, the pressure of wind was suddenly so tremendous that the *Porpoise* either had to spill her sails, carry them away, or lay over on her beam ends with shattered masts. But the straining rig and canvas held under the thrust of wind; the ship canted over on her side, with the weather paddles stopped, the lee paddles wildly thrashing the water.

And thus, drawing on her beam ends not half the water she would when on an even keel, the despised hybrid eased across the reef with feet to spare.

Shrill yelps of incredulity, then cheers of wild amazed delight, burst from the crew. Lund, battered but grinning, left the wheel and was caught in the rush and hug of the Yankee mate.

“You did it, you did it, sir! By the horns o’ Moses, you did it!”

“Just the old pilot-boat trick, Mister,” said Lund, still grinning. “What one can do, another can try. By the way, you and I will have a bit of a celebration in Chefoo. I’m not forgetting that I owe you something.”

He went to the companionway and there paused, to look back across the water at the *Naiad*, and the boat pulling for her through the reef-passages, and the soggy unkempt figure in the stern-sheets. Cap’n Lund waved his hand.

“Smart fellow, Stormalong!” he muttered—and with a twinkle in his blackened eye, he headed below.

**“The Yellow Ship,” a specially dramatic story in this highly interesting series, will appear in the forthcoming August issue.**

[The end of *Stormalong* by Henry Bedford-Jones]