

editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled Literary Club Papers 2, 1886 – 1887 June 5, '86 to May 21, '87)

A True Story!

I was awakened by a most frightful jerk of the ship which seemed to be thrown clear forward on its prow. I at once leaped from my state room, and grabbing my hand bag, that I always carry with me, rushed to the deck just in time to seize a life preserver and jump overboard to save myself from being dragged down with the ship which was sinking rapidly and I was soon struggling in the sea which fortunately was quite calm. I maintained a firm grip on my bag and the life preserver. In a few minutes all was over. The ship sank with every soul on board, and I seemed the only one left to tell the tale. As soon as the screams of the unfortunate passengers left my ears, I began to look about for the cause of the disaster which loomed up before me terrible and mighty in the gray dawn of the morning. We had been struck by an ice-berg. I was at first thunderstruck but soon my wits came to my rescue as I saw that one place on the side seemed pretty flat and low. I at once swam towards it and to my great joy saw that I could clamber up to this flat surface which I did at once dragging after me my life preserver and my bag. I was just recovering myself from my exertions and began to congratulate myself on my temporary escape from drowning, when I heard a call for help and then within a few feet of me, I saw just about to float by, my fair companion of the ship. It took me but a second to throw myself flat on my breast, and stretching out as far as I could reach, just in the nick of time, I caught her by the hair and hauld her in to the ice raft. When I had dragged her up out of the water I found that she had lost consciousness. It took but a moment for me to open my bag, which you know I kept always at hand, and taking my whiskey flask out I poured some of its contents down her throat. Soon she began to show signs of consciousness and at last opened her eyes and looked straight into my own. I tell you fellows it was a critical moment: girl in my arms, alone in an ice-berg, electric shock passing from her eyes to my own etc., but I resisted all temptation and my emotion to myself. However as soon as she had completely recovered her consciousness, we resolved ourselves into a committee of ways and means and began to take an account of stock. You know fellows, since my trip to China, I always travel prepared for anything. So in my packet I had several cans of sardines, some deviled ham, a tin or so of lobster and salmon, a large flask of whiskey, a box of fuses, a pack of cards, a cribbage board, a volume of poems, the last Century, my last girl's picture, brushes, comb, and mirror, blacking-brush and blacking, as well as clean linens, underwear, dress suit and slippers, pair of pumps and presents for the natives. I had feared being wrecked on a desert island and had provided before hand for such a contingency, but had I thought of an iceberg, I might have made different arrangements. We had about completed an account of stock and come to the conclusion that there was enough for us to live upon for some time, when that fair maid called out suddenly

in a tone of horror, "We can't both remain here." "Why not" cried I as I rushed to her and took her in my arms to reassure her. "Why we have no chaperone." Imagine my feelings? I had never thought of that! I at once decided that I would never travel again without a chaperone in my bag. I tried to think of a dozen substitutes for this invaluable article, a chaperone, but every thing seemed in vain. Even my last girl's picture would not do. It was very sad and, as I gazed into her deep eyes and stroked her fair hair as it rested on my shoulder, I thought that I never before had needed a chaperone so badly. But there was nothing to be done: one of us must leave and of course it must be I. As with sorrow and tears I prepared to take my leave, and was about to consign myself to the briny deep, another cry of horror came from my fair companion. Wondering what this new terror might be I followed the direction of her eyes: it was pretty hard to see in just what direction she was looking with her head tucked so close to my shoulder but I perceived a monstrous polar bear advancing upon us. Horror upon horror. I placed her from me and amidst her tears and lamentations advanced to meet this new foe. On he came, with mouth wide open, as he reached the spot where I stood, he raised his mighty paw and gently pushed me aside and rearing upon both hind legs raised the flask which he had just seized from between my feet to his lips and forthwith proceeded to get away with my whiskey. This was too much. Regardless of consequences I siezed the flask and hit him sounding blow on the side of the head. This merely made him wink at me and reach again for the bottle. I put this behind me when with a look of disappointment he dropped to his feet. As he fell I noticed for the first time a collar around his neck with something written upon it. I leaned forward to read it. "If not called for in ten days returned to John Robinson, Cincinnati O. U.S.A." "Aha," thought I, "a fellow citizen" and as he advanced toward me again quick as a flash I whipped out my card and presented it to him. When he saw my occupation, that of a lawyer, and my address, Cincinnati, he weakened at once and submissively bowing his head he retired some distance. As a returned in triumph to my fair companion I saw a look of perfect content on her face.

"He will do for a chaperone."

Well the bear proved a very agreeable companion. He never interrupted except when invited and soon learned to take a hand at cribbage. He had some difficulty with the pegs but we generally managed those for him. It soon began to be understood that we were to play for the drinks against fish that he caught while lying over the side and in that way as we were pretty even players and were playing two against one, he kept us moderately well supplied, and we kept our canned meats for a rainy day. Fresh water we obtained by breaking off hunks of ice and melting it in a tin cup over fire made of driftwood. The time passed pleasantly enough and as we drifted further south the weather became very much warmer until it was clear that we had struck some current running up from a warmer country. And here the most remarkable part of our trip came about. One day as the great raft began to wobble more and more unsteadily as if there were some great commotion underneath, I saw our friend the bear trying to

fasten the bag to the life preserver. I watched him for a long time before I understood the reason but all at once I saw the wisdom of his course and ran to his assistance and tied the bag firmly to the float. The purpose of this was soon apparent. The mountain of ice began to wobble more and more until finally it slowly began to turn over. Slowly at first and then with a jerk & we were all in the water. In a short time we found a flat place in what had been the bottom, and recovering our bag were again comfortably quartered. I explained thus to my fair companion the cause of the sudden upheaval. As we drifted with the warmer current, the ice below had gradually melted away until the mountain of ice became top-heavy when obeying a well-known law of nature that of gravitation the top became bottom in the bottom top, in other words, we turned over. This occurred several times but thanks to experience we soon learned to get to the edge & crawl around to the other side; while on several overturnings we did not get so many wettings. To cut a long story short, we were finally cited by a ship, who sent a boat and took us off. The bear they were afraid of, and refused to take, and in fact he evidently was averse to leave his floating home, so we left him the whiskey bottle and the pack of cards; and the last we saw him he was playing solitaire and staking drinks against total abstinence. And that is all.

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