

days since Glavin sawed off my hand. I can still feel it there, invisible. When I think of what it became, when I think of what needed to be done? Last night I imagined, or dreamt, I could feel the flames, the terrible consumption. Is that just a phantom of pain, an trick of deceitful nerves, or was there still some connection in the end?

The operation was a success, but the gangrene cannot be denied, and the red lines of infection have spread past the tourniquet and up my arm. There is nothing to be done. My own stench disgusts me. However, I shall not have to bear the stink for much longer. Nor for that matter the pain. I shall miss Glavin, nonetheless. Before he succumbed, he was a good man. I cannot fault him for what he became. I cannot fault any of them, and may God forgive what we have done. They were men once.

Let us never forget that.

I am no Shackleton, no Mawson, to face the odds and overcome them. I am merely a tired soul who will soon die alone upon the ice. The horrible endless ice. It is beautiful, but heartless. In these past few days I have come to hate its cruelty. It cries, and whispers, and moans to me in the still air, grinding hopes and prayers away in mindless hostile fury. There is nothing for anyone here. Even the whales are gone, fallen prey to, to what? That disease? That thing?

Dear reader, if you exist, there in the blissful hopeful expectation of futurity, dear reader, dear judge, dear keeper of my good name, put aside your prejudices and understand that I am a man, like you, and fully in control of my faculties. So listen.

I fully understand that the narrative you have just read will appear as the ravings of a lunatic. But I swear upon the head of my boy, my Jacob, what I have placed here on paper is the honest truth, every word of it. Hear that. Listen to me. Listen to my men, if they survive, if the boat you find is not empty. They will confirm these awful words.

The time has finally come. This is the conclusion, this is the finale, the bitter end of it. Within the hour, Jasper will carry out my fatal order, and our dear Wally will be no more. She will sink into her watery grave, and this madness will be entombed by the unforgiving sea.

No Shackleton am I, but I am a captain, and I shall go down with my ship.

I no longer believe in God. But if He remains in heaven, and has not vacated His throne, I implore him to watch over and protect my men. Their journey will be terrible, and I do not envy their survival. Let me praise once again the excellence and skill of my officers and crew. Their loyalty and stout hearts are without peer. I wish them well and pray that they are swiftly rescued and are soon homeward bound.

I would like to say one last thing before I seal this letter and place it in the capable hands of my first mate.

My wife is named Nancy. She lives in Kingsport, at 235 Sleet Lane. She is now a widow, raising Jacob alone, a task that cannot be easy for her. Do not show her this letter. Do not tell her I died afraid and godless and stinking of gangrene. Please tell her that my death was easy. Please tell her that my last thoughts were of her and Jacob. Tell her that I love her. Tell her that she has kept me company these last few days, these terrible days of decay and madness and "peril on the sea."

Tell her that she is my life.

Nancy, forgive me.

Cpt. Stephen Willard, S. S. Wallaroo