

ATLANTIS FOUND

CLIVE CUSSLER



BERKLEY BOOKS, NEW YORK

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Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[PART ONE - AS CLOSE TO HELL AS YOU CAN GET](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[PART TWO - IN THE FOOTPRINTS OF THE ANCIENTS](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[PART THREE - TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY ARK](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[PART FOUR - CITY UNDER THE ICE](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Chapter 40](#)

[Chapter 41](#)

[Chapter 42](#)

[Chapter 43](#)

[Chapter 44](#)

[Chapter 45](#)

[Chapter 46](#)

[Chapter 47](#)

[PART FIVE - ASHES, ASHES, ALL FALL DOWN](#)

[PART SIX - FINAL BLESSING](#)

[POSTSCRIPT](#)

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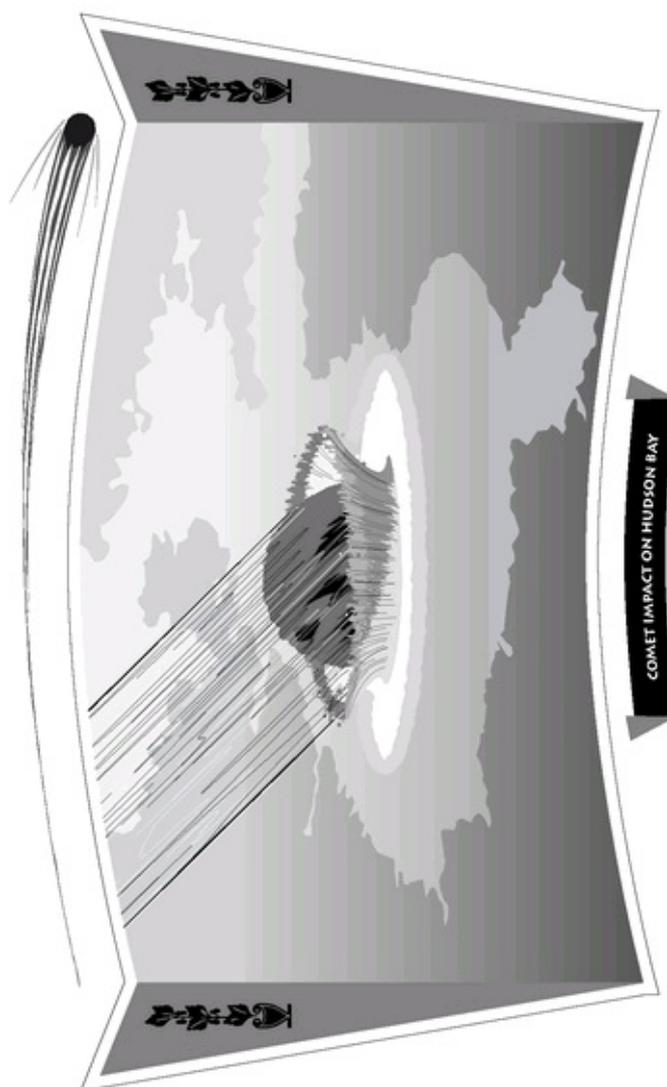
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IMPACT



7120 B.C.

WHAT IS NOW HUDSON BAY, CANADA

THE INTRUDER CAME FROM beyond. A nebulous celestial body as old as the universe itself, it had been born in a vast cloud of ice, rocks, dust, and gas when the outer planets of the solar system were formed 4.6 billion years ago. Soon after its scattered particles had frozen into a solid mass one mile in diameter, it began streaking silently through the emptiness of space on an orbital voyage that carried it around a distant sun and halfway to the nearest stars again, a journey lasting many thousands of years from start to finish.

The comet's core, or nucleus, was a conglomeration of frozen water, carbon monoxide, methane gas, and jagged blocks of metallic rocks. It might accurately be described as a dirty snowball hurled through space by the hand of God. But as it whirled past the sun and swung around on its return path beyond the outer reaches of the solar system, the solar radiation reacted with its nucleus and a metamorphosis took place. The ugly duckling soon became a thing of beauty.

As it began to absorb the sun's heat and ultraviolet light, a long comma formed that slowly grew into an enormous luminous blue tail that curved and stretched out behind the nucleus for a distance of

90 million miles. A shorter, white dust tail more than one million miles wide also materialized and curled out on the sides of the larger tail like the fins of a fish.

Each time the comet passed the sun, it lost more of its ice and its nucleus diminished. Eventually, another 200 million years, it would lose all its ice and break up into a cloud of dust and become a series of small meteorites. This comet, however, would never orbit outside the solar system or pass around the sun again. It would not be allowed a slow, cold death far out in the blackness of space. Within a few short minutes, its life would be snuffed out. But on this, its latest orbit, the comet passed within 900,000 miles of Jupiter, whose great gravitational force veered it off on a collision course with the third planet from the sun, a planet its inhabitants called Earth.

Plunging into Earth's atmosphere at 130,000 miles an hour on a forty-five-degree angle, its speed ever-increasing with the gravitational pull, the comet created a brilliant luminescent bow shock as its ten-mile-wide, four-billion-ton mass began to break into fragments due to friction from its great speed. Seven seconds later, the misshapen comet, having become a blinding fireball, smashed onto Earth's surface with horrendous effect. The immediate result from the explosive release of kinetic energy upon impact was to gouge out a massive cavity twice the size of the island of Hawaii as it vaporized and displaced a gigantic volume of water and soil.

The entire earth staggered from the seismic shock of a 12.0 earthquake. Millions of tons of water, sediment, and debris burst upward, thrown through the hole in the atmosphere above the impact site and into the stratosphere, along with a great spray of pulverized, fiery rock that was ejected into suborbital trajectories before raining back to earth as blazing meteorites. Firestorms destroyed forests throughout the world. Volcanoes that had been dormant for thousands of years suddenly erupted, sending oceans of molten lava spreading over millions of square miles, blanketing the ground a thousand or more feet deep. So much smoke and debris were hurled into the atmosphere and later blown into every corner of the land by terrible winds that they blocked out the sun for nearly a year, sending temperatures plunging below freezing, and shrouding Earth in darkness. Climatic change in every corner of the world came with incredible suddenness. Temperatures at vast ice fields and northern glaciers rose until they reached between ninety and a hundred degrees Fahrenheit, causing a rapid melt-down. Animals accustomed to tropical and temperate zones became extinct overnight. Many, such as the woolly mammoths, turned to ice where they stood in the warmth of summer, grasses and flowers still undigested in their stomachs. Trees, along with their leaves and fruit, were quick-frozen. For days, fish that were hurled upward from the impact fell from the blackened skies.

Waves five to ten miles in height were thrown against the continents, surging over shorelines with destructive power that was awesome in magnitude. Water swept over low coastal plains and swept hundreds of miles inland, destroying everything in its path. Endless quantities of debris and sediment from the ocean floors were spread over low landmasses. Only when the great surge smashed against the base of mountains did it curl under and begin a slow retreat, but not before changing the course of rivers, filling land basins with seas where none existed before and turning large lakes into deserts.

The chain reaction seemed endless.

With a low rumble that grew to the roar of continuous thunder, the mountains began to sway like palm trees under a light breeze as avalanches swept down their sides. Deserts and grassy plains undulated as the onslaught from the oceans reared up and struck inland again. The shock from the comet's impact had caused a sudden and massive displacement in Earth's thin crust. The outer shell, less than forty miles thick, and the mantle that lay over the hot fluid core buckled and twisted, shifting

crustal layers like the skin of a grapefruit that had been surgically removed and then neatly replaced so it could move around the core of fruit inside. As if controlled by an unseen hand, the entire crust then moved as a unit.

Entire continents were shoved around to new locations. Hills were thrust up to become mountains. Islands throughout the Pacific Ocean vanished, while others emerged for the first time. Antarctica, previously west of Chile, slid over two thousand miles to the south, where it was quickly buried under growing sheets of ice. The vast ice pack that once floated in the Indian Ocean west of Australia now found itself in a temperate zone and rapidly began to melt. The same occurred with the former North Pole, which had spread throughout northern Canada. The new pole soon began to produce a thick ice mass in the middle of what once had been open ocean.

The destruction was relentless. The convulsions and holocaust went on as if they would never stop. The movement of the Earth's thin outer shell piled cataclysm upon cataclysm. The abrupt melting of the former ice packs, combined with glaciers covering the continents that had suddenly shifted into or near tropical zones, caused the seas to rise four hundred feet, drowning the already destroyed land that had been overwhelmed by tidal waves from the comet's impact. In the time span of a single day, Britain, connected to the rest of the European continent by a dry plain, was now an island, while a desert that became known as the Persian Gulf was abruptly inundated. The Nile River, having flowed into a vast fertile valley and then on toward the great ocean to the west, now ended at what had suddenly become the Mediterranean Sea.

The last great ice age had ended in the geological blink of an eye.

The dramatic change in the oceans and their circulation around the world also caused the poles to shift, drastically disturbing the earth's rotational balance. Earth's axis was temporarily thrown off by two degrees, as the North and South Poles were displaced to new geographical locations, altering the centrifugal acceleration around the outer surface of the sphere. Because they were fluid, the seas adapted before the earth made another three revolutions. But the landmass could not react as quickly. Earthquakes went on for months.

Savage storms with brutal winds swirled around the earth, shredding and disintegrating everything that stood on the ground for the next eighteen years before the poles stopped wobbling and settled into their new rotational axis. In time, sea levels stabilized, permitting new shorelines to form as bizarre climatic conditions continued to moderate. Changes became permanent. The time sequence between night and day changed as the number of days in a year decreased by two. The earth's magnetic field was also affected and moved northwest over a hundred miles.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of different species of animals and fish became instantly extinct. In the Americas, the one-humped camel, the mammoth, an ice age horse, and the giant sloth all disappeared. Gone also were the saber-toothed tiger, huge birds with twenty-five-foot wingspans and many other animals that weighed a hundred or more pounds, most dying by asphyxiation from the smoke and volcanic gases.

Nor did the vegetation on land escape the apocalypse. Plant life not turned to ashes by the holocaust died for lack of sunlight, along with the algae in the seas. In the end, over 85 percent of all life on Earth would die from floods, fires, storms, avalanches, poison from the atmosphere, and eventual starvation.

Human societies, many quite advanced, and a myriad of emerging cultures on the threshold of a progressive golden age were annihilated in a single horrendous day and night. Millions of Earth's

men, women, and children died horribly. All vestiges of emerging civilizations were gone, and the few pathetic survivors were left with nothing but dim memories of the past. The coffin had been closed on the greatest uninterrupted advance of mankind, a ten-thousand-year journey from the simple Cro-Magnon man to kings, architects, stonemasons, artists, and warriors. Their works and their mortal remains were buried deep beneath new seas, leaving few physical examples and fragments of an ancient advanced culture. Entire nations and cities that had stood only a few hours before vanished without a trace. The cataclysm of such magnitude left almost no evidence of any prior transcendent civilizations.

Of the shockingly low number of humans who survived, almost all lived in the higher altitudes of mountain ranges and were able to hide in caves to escape the furies of the turbulence. Unlike the more advanced Bronze Age peoples who tended to cluster and build on low-lying plains near rivers and ocean shorelines, the inhabitants of the mountains were Stone Age nomads. It was as though the creations of the crop, the Leonardo da Vincis, the Picassos, and the Einsteins of their era had evaporated into nothingness, abruptly leaving the world to be taken over by primitive nomadic hunters, a phenomenon similar to what happened to the glory of Greece and Rome after it was cast aside in favor of centuries of ignorance and creative lethargy. A neolithic dark age shrouded the grave of the highly cultured civilizations that once existed in the world, a dark age that would last for two thousand years. Slowly, very slowly, did mankind finally walk from the dark and begin building and creating cities and civilizations again in Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Pitifully few of the gifted builders and creative thinkers of the lost cultures survived to reach high ground. Realizing their civilization was lost, never to rise again, they began a centuries-long quest to erect the mysterious megaliths and dolmens of huge upright stones found across Europe, Asia, the Pacific Islands, and into the lower Americas. Long after the memory of their shining legacy had dimmed and become little more than myth, their monuments commemorating the frightful destruction and loss of life still acted as warnings of the next cataclysm to future generations. But within a millennium, their descendants slowly forgot the old ways and assimilated with the nomadic tribes and ceased to exist as a race of advanced people.

For hundreds of years after the convulsion, humans were afraid to venture down from the mountains and reinhabit the lower lands and coastal shorelines. The technically superior seafaring nations were but vague thoughts of a distant past. Ship construction and sailing techniques were lost and had to be reinvented by later generations whose more accomplished ancestors were revered simply as gods.

All this death and devastation was caused by a hunk of dirty ice no larger than a small farm town in Iowa. The comet had wreaked its unholy havoc, mercilessly, viciously. The earth had not been ravaged with such vehemence since a meteor had struck 65 million years earlier in a catastrophe that had exterminated the dinosaurs.

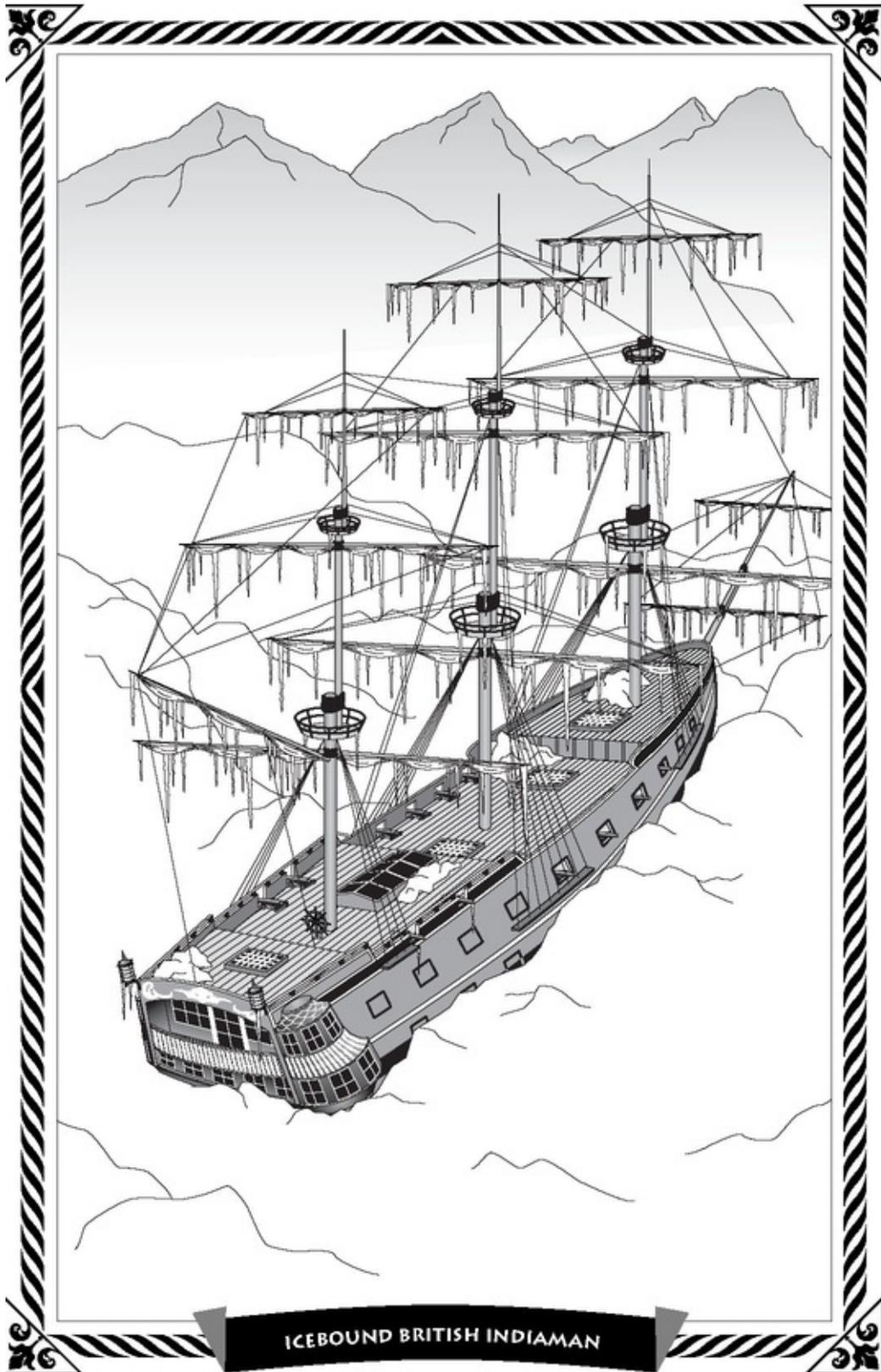
For thousands of years after the impact, comets were associated with superstitions of catastrophic events and considered omens of future tragedies. They were blamed for everything from wars and pestilence to death and destruction. Not until recent history were comets considered nature's wonders like the splendor of a rainbow or clouds painted gold by a setting sun.

The biblical flood and a host of other calamity legends all had ties to this one tragedy. The ancient civilizations of Olmecs, Mayans, and Aztecs of Central America had many traditions relating to an ancient cataclysmic event. The Indian tribes throughout the United States passed down stories of waters flooding over their lands. The Chinese, the Polynesians, and Africans all spoke of a cataclysm

that decimated their ancestors.

But the legend that was spawned and that flourished throughout the centuries, the one that provoked the most mystery and intrigue, was that of the lost continent and civilization of Atlantis.

GHOST SHIP



SEPTEMBER 30, 1858
STEFANSSON BAY, ANTARCTICA

ROXANNA MENDER KNEW THAT if she stopped walking she would die. She was near complete exhaustion and moving on willpower alone. The temperature was well below zero, but it was the windchill from the frigid teeth of the ice gale that was biting through her skin. The deadly drowsiness

gently slipping over her was slowly draining her will to live. She moved forward, one foot groping ahead of the other, ~~stumbling when caught off balance by a sudden break in the ice field.~~ Her breath came in the rapid, rasping panting of a mountain climber struggling toward a peak in the Himalayas without oxygen equipment.

Her vision was nonexistent as the icy windblown particles swirled in front of her face, protected by a thick woolen scarf wrapped inside her fur-lined parka. Though she only squinted between the layers of the scarf every other minute, her eyes were sore and reddened from the onslaught of the tiny granules. Frustration gripped Roxanna when she looked up and saw the dazzling blue sky and brilliant sun above the storm. Blinding ice storms under clear skies were not an uncommon phenomenon in Antarctica.

Surprisingly, snow rarely falls in the South Polar region. It is so incredibly cold that the atmosphere cannot contain water vapor, so any snowfall is minimal. Not more than five inches falls over the continent in the course of a year. Some of the snow that is already on the ground is actually several thousand years old. The harsh sun strikes the white ice on an oblique angle and its heat is reflected back into space, contributing largely to the extraordinarily cold temperatures.

Roxanna was fortunate. The cold did not penetrate her clothing. Rather than wearing European cold weather garb, she was dressed in clothing her husband had acquired while trading with Eskimos during his earlier whaling expeditions in the Arctic. Her inner clothing consisted of a tunic, short knee-length pants, and a socklike boot made with soft fur worn against her feet. Separate outerwear protected against extreme cold. The parka was loose-fitting to allow body heat to circulate and escape without the problem of sweat buildup. It was made from wolf fur, while the pants came from a caribou. The boots stood high and were worn over the socks, with the fur inward.

Her greatest physical danger lay in breaking an ankle or leg on the uneven surface, and if she somehow survived, there was the threat of frostbite. Though her body was protected, it was her face that worried her. At the least tingle on either her cheek or nose, she vigorously rubbed the skin to restart circulation. She had already watched six of her husband's crew develop frostbite, two of them losing toes and one his ears.

Thankfully, the icy gale began to die away and lose its violence, and her progress became easier than it had been for the past hour she had been wandering lost. The howling wind faded from her ears and she could hear the squeak of the ice crystals beneath her feet.

She reached a hill about fifteen feet high from base to ridge formed by the restless sea ice grinding and forcing the floe upward into what was called a hummock. Most formed an uneven surface, but the one was weathered until its sides were smooth. Falling to her hands and knees, she clawed her way upward, sliding back two feet for every three she gained.

The exertion took what little strength Roxanna had left. Without knowing how, or remembering the struggle, she pulled herself onto the ridge of the hummock half-dead from exhaustion, heart pounding, breath coming in labored gasps. She did not know how long she lay there, but she was thankful to rest her eyes from the ice-plagued wind. After a few minutes, when her heart slowed and her breath began to come evenly, Roxanna cursed herself for the predicament she had foolishly caused. Time had no reference. Without a watch, she had no idea how many hours had passed since she walked from her husband's whaling ship, the *Paloverde*.

Nearly six months earlier, the ship had become locked in the pack ice, and to endure the boredom she had begun taking daily hikes, keeping within easy view of the ship and its crew, who kept an eye

on her. That morning the skies had dawned crystal clear when she left the ship, but they soon turned dark and vanished when the ice storm swept over the ice. Within minutes, the ship had disappeared and Roxanna found herself wandering lost on the ice pack.

Traditionally, most whalers never sailed with women aboard. But many wives refused to sit at home for the three to four years their husbands were gone. Roxanna Mender was not about to spend thousands of lonely hours alone. She was a hardy woman, though petite, barely reaching five feet in height and weighing less than a hundred pounds. With her light brown eyes and ready smile, she was a pretty woman who seldom complained of the hardship and boredom and who rarely became seasick. In her cramped cabin she had already given birth to a baby boy, whom she had named Samuel. And though she had yet to tell her husband, she was about two months pregnant with the next baby. She had found acceptance aboard ship with the crew, taught several to read, written letters home to their wives and families, and acted as nurse whenever there was an injury or sickness on board.

THE *Paloverde* was one of the fleet of whalers that sailed from San Francisco on the nation's west coast. She was a stout ship, especially constructed for polar operations during the whaling season. With a length of 132 feet, a beam of 30 feet, and a draft of 17 feet, her tonnage was close to 330. Her dimensions allowed for a large cargo of whale oil and accommodations for a large crew of officers and men for voyages that could last as long as three years. Her pine keel, timbers, and beams were cut from the forests of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Once they were positioned, the three-inch planking was laid on and fastened by trunnels, a wooden nail usually cut from oak.

She was rigged as a three-masted bark, and her lines were clean, bold, and rakish. Her cabins were neatly furnished and paneled in Washington spruce. The captain's cabin was particularly well appointed because of his wife's insistence that she accompany him on the long voyage. The figurehead was a finely carved image of a paloverde tree, native to the southwest. The ship's name was spread across the stern in carved letters gilded in gold. Also adorning the stern was a spread-winged carving of the California condor.

Instead of sailing north through the Bering Sea toward the Arctic and the more established waters for whale hunting, Roxanna's husband, Captain Bradford Mender, had taken the *Paloverde* south to the Antarctic. He believed that since the region was overlooked and seldom visited by the hardy whalers from New England, there was a golden opportunity to find virgin whaling grounds.

Soon after arriving near the Antarctic Circle, the crew took six whales as the ship sailed in the open water between the shore, often threading its way through a sea of icebergs. Then, in the last week of March, the Antarctic autumn, the ice built over the sea at incredible speed until it reached a thickness of nearly four feet. The *Paloverde* might still have escaped to clear water, but a sudden shift of wind became a howling gale that drove the ship back toward shore. With no avenue of escape left open, as the ice charged toward them in chunks larger than the ship itself, the crew of the *Paloverde* could only stand helpless and watch the cold trap spring shut.

The ice quickly surged around the whaler with such force as to shove her relentlessly toward the land as if caught in a giant fist. The clear water near the land was quickly filling with a sheet of ice. Mender and his crew desperately labored and finally succeeded in getting the *Paloverde's* anchors to hold in six fathoms less than two miles from shore. But within hours, the ship was jammed tightly in the ice that continued to thicken, and soon all signs of water were replaced by a white shroud. The Antarctic winter was upon them, and the days began to shrink. There was no hope of escaping, and

mild weather with warmer temperatures was a good seven months away.

The sails were dried, rolled up, and stowed away, to be raised again in the spring, if divine providence allowed for warmer weather and permitted the ship to float free. Now, in anticipation of a long imprisonment, all food was carefully inventoried and rationed for the long months of winter. Whether the victuals stored aboard the ship could be stretched until the ice began to melt in the spring was anybody's guess. But dropping lines and hooks through holes in the ice had produced better-than-hoped-for results and a nice assortment of Antarctic fish were soon frozen in a deck larder. And then there were the comical penguins on the shore. There appeared to be millions of them. The only dilemma was that no matter how the ship's cook prepared their meat, it tasted most unpleasant.

The principal threats facing the crew of the whaler were the terrible cold and any sudden movement of the ice floe. The danger of freezing was greatly reduced by burning the oil from the whales they had harpooned before becoming locked in the ice. The hold still held more than a hundred barrels, easily enough to keep the stoves burning through the worst of the Antarctic winter.

Until now, the floe had been relatively undisturbed. But Mender knew that it was only a matter of time before the ice would buckle and shift. Then the *Paloverde* could easily find her hull crushed to splinters, her stout timbers flattened as if they were paper, by a massive migrating iceberg. He did not relish the thought of his wife and baby trying to survive on land until another ship was sighted in the summer. And the odds of that happening were a thousand to one at best.

There was also the deadly menace of disease. Seven of the men were showing signs of scurvy. The only bright area was that the vermin and rats had long before succumbed to the awful cold. The long Antarctic nights, the isolation and freezing wind, nurtured the gloom of apathy. Mender combated the restless boredom by keeping his men busy on chores, endless jobs to keep their minds and bodies active.

Mender had sat in his cabin at his desk and recalculated their odds of survival a hundred times. But no matter how he twisted the options and possibilities, the eventuality always remained the same. Their chances of floating undamaged and intact come spring were bleak indeed.

THE icy windstorm had ended as abruptly as it had arrived, and the sun returned. Peering through squinting eyes over the dazzling sparkle of the ice pack, Roxanna saw her shadow. How joyous to see her shadow again despite the endless emptiness around her. But then her heart surged as she scanned the horizon and spotted the *Paloverde* a good mile and a half away. The black hull was nearly hidden by the ice, but she could see the huge American flag flapping in the dying breeze and realized that her worried husband had hung it high in the rigging of the mainmast as a beacon. She found it hard to believe that she had strayed so far. In her numbed mind, she thought that she had remained reasonably close to the ship while wandering in circles.

The ice pack was not all empty isolation. Roxanna could see tiny specks moving across its surface, and she realized that it was her husband and his crew searching for her. She was about to stand up and wave, when suddenly she caught sight of something most unexpected—the masts of another ship looming between two giant floebergs, hummocks frozen together and grounded on the shore.

The three masts and bowsprit, along with their rigging, looked to be intact, with the sails furled. With the wind fallen to a slight breeze, she unwrapped the scarf from her face and eyes and could see that most of the ship's hull was embedded in the ice. Roxanna's father had been a sea captain who had commanded clipper ships in the tea trade to China, and as a young girl she had seen thousands of ships

of all types of rigs and sails arrive and depart Boston, but the only time she had seen a ship like the one encrusted with ice was in a painting that hung in her grandfather's house.

The ghostly ship was old, very old, with a huge rounded stern bearing windows and quarter galleries that hung over the water. She had been built long, narrow, and deep. A good 140 feet in length with at least a 35-foot beam, Roxanna estimated. Like the ship she had seen in the painting. This one had to be an 800-ton British Indiaman of the late eighteenth century.

She turned from the ship and waved her scarf to attract her husband and crew. One caught the movement on the ice out of the corner of his eye and alerted the others. They quickly began running across the broken ice toward her, with Captain Mender in the lead. Twenty minutes later, the crew of the *Paloverde* had reached her, shouting joyously at finding her alive.

Usually a quiet, taciturn man, Mender showed uncharacteristic emotion when he swept Roxanne into his arms, tears frozen to his cheeks, and kissed her long and lovingly. "Oh God!" he muttered, "I thought you were dead. It's truly a miracle you survived."

A whaling master at the age of twenty-eight, Bradford Mender was thirty-six and on his tenth voyage when his ship had become locked in the Antarctic ice. A tough, resourceful New Englander, he stood six feet tall and was big all over, weighing in at close to 225 pounds. His eyes were a piercing blue and his hair was black; a beard ran from ears to chin. Stern but fair, he never had a problem with officers and crew that he couldn't handle efficiently and honestly. A superb whale-hunter and navigator, Mender was also a shrewd businessman who was not only master of his ship but its owner as well.

"If you hadn't insisted I wear the Eskimo clothing you gave me, I would have frozen to death hours ago."

He released her and turned to the six members of his crew who surrounded them, cheered that the captain's wife had been found alive. "Let us get Mrs. Mender back to the ship quickly and get some hot soup in her."

"No, not yet," she said, clutching him by the arm and pointing. "I've discovered another ship."

Every man turned, their eyes following her outstretched arm.

"An Englishman. I recognized her lines from a painting in my grandfather's parlor in Boston. It looks like a derelict."

Mender stared at the apparition, which was ghostly white under its tomb of ice. "I do believe you're right. She does have the lines of a very old merchantman from the 1770s."

"I suggest that we investigate, Captain," said the *Paloverde*'s first mate, Nathan Bigelow. "She may still contain provisions that will help us survive till spring."

"They would have to be a good eighty years old," Mender said heavily.

"But preserved by the cold," Roxanna reminded him.

He looked at her tenderly. "You've had a hard time, dear wife. I'll have one of the men escort you back to the *Paloverde*."

"No, husband," Roxanna said resolutely, her fatigue banished, "I intend to see what there is to see. Before the captain could protest, she took off down the slope of the hummock to the pack ice and set off toward the abandoned vessel.

Mender looked at his crew and shrugged. "Far be it from me to argue with a curious woman."

“A ghost ship,” murmured Bigelow. “A great pity she’s forever locked in the ice, or we could sail her home and apply for salvage rights.”

“She’s too ancient to be worth much,” said Mender.

“Why are you men standing there in the cold, babbling?” said Roxanna, turning and urging the men on impatiently. “Let us hurry before another storm sweeps in.”

Making their way over the ice as fast as possible until they reached the deserted ship, they found that the ice had piled against the hull, making it easy for them to reach the upper bulwarks and climb over the gunwales. Roxanna, her husband, and the crewmen found themselves standing on the quarterdeck, which was covered by a thin layer of ice.

Mender stared around at the desolation and shook his head as if bewildered. “Amazing that her hull wasn’t crushed by the ice.”

“I never thought I’d be standing on the deck of an English East Indiaman,” one of the crewmen muttered, his eyes reflecting apprehension. “Certainly not one built before my grandfather was born.”

“She’s a good-sized ship,” said Mender slowly. “About nine hundred tons, I’d guess. A hundred and fifty feet long with a forty-foot beam.”

Laid and fitted out in a Thames River shipyard, the work-horse of the late-eighteenth-century British merchant fleet, the Indiaman was a crossbreed among ships. She was built mainly as a cargo carrier, but those were still the days of pirates and marauding warships from England’s enemies, so she was armed with twenty-eight eighteen-pound cannon. Besides being built to transport goods and merchandise, she was also fitted out with cabins to carry passengers. Everything on the deck was standing, encased in ice, as if awaiting a phantom crew. The guns sat silently at their ports, the lifeboats were still lashed atop the spare spars, and all hatches were neatly in place.

There was an eerie and dreadful strangeness about the old ship, a curious grimness that belonged not of earth but of another world. A mindless fear gripped the crewmen who stood on the deck that some hoary, gruesome creature was waiting to receive them. Sailors are a superstitious lot, and there were none, except for Roxanna, who was in the innocent throes of almost girlish enthusiasm, who did not feel a deep sense of apprehension.

“Odd,” said Bigelow. “It’s as if the crew abandoned the ship before it became trapped in the ice.”

“I doubt that,” said Mender grimly. “The lifeboats are still stowed.”

“God only knows what we’ll find belowdecks.”

“Then let’s go see,” Roxanna said excitedly.

“Not you, my dear. I think it best if you remain here.”

She gave her husband a proud look and slowly shook her head. “I’ll not wait alone while there are ghosts walking about.”

“If there are any ghosts,” said Bigelow, “they’d have frozen solid by now.”

Mender gave orders to his men. “We’ll divide into two search parties. Mr. Bigelow, take three men and look about the crew’s quarters and the cargo hold. The rest of us will go aft and search the passenger and officers’ quarters.”

Bigelow nodded. “Aye, Captain.”

Snow and ice had built up into a small mountain around the door leading into the stern cabins, so

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