

The Raging Canal

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Come listen to my story, ye landsmen one and all
I'll sing to you the dangers of that raging canal.
For I am one of many who expects a watery grave,
For I've been at the mercy of the wind and of the wave.

I left Albany harbor about the break of day,
And if I rightly remember 'twas the second day of May
We trusted to our driver, altho' he was but small
For he knew all the windings of that raging canal.

It seemed as if the Devil had his work in hand that night,
For all our oil was gone, and our lamps they gave no light,
The clouds began to gather and the rain began to fall
And I wished myself off of that raging canal.

The captain told his driver to hurry with all speed,
And his orders were obeyed, for he soon cracked up his lead;
With the fastest kind of driving, we allowed by twelve o'clock
We'd be on old Schenectady right bang against the dock.

But sad was the fate of our poor devoted bark,
For the rain kept on pouring and the night it grew dark;
The horses gave a stumble and the driver gave squall
And they tumbled head over heels into the raging canal.

The Captain came on deck, with a voice so clear and sound,
Saying, "Cut the horses loose, my boys, or else we'll all be drowned
The driver swam to shore, altho' he was but small
While the horses sank to rise no more in the raging canal.

The cook she wrung her hands, and she came upon the deck
Saying, "Alas, what will become of us, our boat it is a wreck?"
The steersman knocked her over, for he was a man of sense
And the bowsman jumped ashore and he lashed her to a fence.

The Captain came on deck with a spy glass in his hand
But the night it was so dark he could not discover land;
He said to us with a faltering voice, while tears began to fall
Prepare to meet your death this night on the raging canal.

The sky was rent asunder, the lighting it did flash

The thunder rattled up above, just like eternal smash
The clouds were all upsot, and the rigging it did fall
And we scudded under bare poles on that raging canal.

We took the old cook's pettycoat, for want of better dress
And rigged it out upon the pole as a signal of distress
We pledged ourselves hand to hand aboard the boat to bide
And not to quit the deck while a plank hung to her side.

At last that horrid night cut dirt from the sky,
The storm it did abate, and a boat came passing by,
It soon espied our signal as each on his knees did fall
Thankful we escaped a grave on the raging canal.

We each of us took a nip and signed the pledge anew
And wonderful as danger ceased, how up our courage grew,
The craft in sight bore down on us and quickly was 'long side
And we all jumped aboard, and for Buffalo did ride.

Now, if I live a thousand years, the horrors of that night
Will ever in my memory be a spot most burning bright;
For nothing in this whole wide world will ever raise my gall
Except the thoughts of my voyage on the raging canal.

From The Canaller's Songbook, Hullfish

Note: Probably the most famous and popular canal song of the 1800s.

Inspired The Aged Pilot Man, a parody by Mark Twain.

See AGEPILT