

From *Taking on the World*

Ellen MacArthur became famous in 2001 when she competed in the Vendée Globe solo round-the-world yacht race. She was the youngest (24 years old) and probably the shortest (just 5ft 2in!) competitor. She came second, despite appalling weather, exhaustion and, as she describes here, problems with her boat.

I climbed the mast on Christmas Eve, and though I had time to get ready, it was the hardest climb to date. I had worked through the night preparing for it, making sure I had all the tools, mouse lines and bits I might need, and had agonised for hours over how I should prepare the halyard¹ so that it would stream out easily below me and would not get caught as I climbed.

When it got light I decided that the time was right. I kitted up in my middle layer clothes as I didn't want to wear so much that I wouldn't be able to move freely up there. The most dangerous thing apart from falling off is to be thrown against the mast, and though I would be wearing a helmet it would not be difficult to break bones up there.....

I laid out the new halyard on deck, flaking it neatly so there were no twists. As I took the mast in my hands and began to climb I felt almost as if I was stepping out on to the moon – a world over which I had no control. You can't ease the sheets² or take a reef³, nor can you alter the settings for the autopilot. If something goes wrong you are not there to attend to it. You are a passive observer looking down at your boat some 90 feet below you. After climbing just a couple of metres I realised how hard it was going to be, I couldn't feel my fingers – I'd need gloves, despite the loss of dexterity. I climbed down, getting soaked as we ploughed into a wave – the decks around my feet were awash. I unclipped my jumars⁴ from the halyard and put on a pair of sailing gloves. There would be no second climb on this one – I knew that I would not have the energy.

As I climbed my hands were more comfortable, and initially progress was positive. But it got harder and harder as I was not only pulling my own weight up as I climbed but also the increasingly heavy halyard – nearly 200 feet of rope by the time I made it to the top. The physical drain came far less from the climbing than from the clinging on. The hardest thing is just to hang on as the mast slices erratically through the air. There would be the odd massive wave which I could feel us surf down, knowing we would pile into the wave in front. I would wrap my arms around the mast and press my face against its cold and slippery carbon surface, waiting for the shuddering slowdown. Eyes closed and teeth gritted, I hung on tight, wrists clenched together, and hoped.

Comment [p1]: The highlighted "I"s emphasizes her loneliness and how she has to face the struggles on her own.

Comment [p2]: This emphasizes her loneliness as Christmas Eve is a time that you normally spend with your family.

Comment [p3]: This accentuates the challenge and the hardship of the climb.

Comment [p4]: The fact that she was prepared lowers the tension and gives a sense of relief

Comment [p5]: This emphasizes the danger of the climb and what could go wrong.

Comment [p6]: Sounds confidence and makes her seem like she knows what she is doing.

Comment [p7]: Emphasizes danger, extreme.

Comment [p8]: Readers would think that the most dangerous thing is falling off however the word "apart" emphasizes that the climb is

Comment [p9]: Graphic image emphasizes the danger of the climb.

Comment [p10]: The safety precaution she needs to take emphasizes the danger

Comment [p11]: Again, graphic imagery accentuating the danger

Comment [p12]: Ellipsis emphasizes tension, suggests danger.

Comment [p13]: The simile signifies

Comment [p14]: Having no control when she is up there emphasizes the danger

Comment [p15]: Emphasizes the danger that she can do nothing even if something goes wrong

Comment [p16]: The highlighted "you"(s) reaches out to the reader to make them think about the danger.

Comment [p17]: Using number/figures to signify to how high it is

Comment [p18]: Numbness of finger signifies to the difficulty of the climb – she only climbed up a few meters and she already can't feel her fingers.

Comment [p19]: Certain that she will not be able to climb again if she fails this one – increases tension.

Comment [p20]: A sense of relief as she is making positive progress

Comment [p21]: Repetition emphasizes how hard it is going to be.

Comment [p22]: Statistic is used to help the reader imagine.

Comment [p23]: Signifying struggle

Comment [p24]: Emphasizes the danger as she is "clinging on"

Comment [p25]: Slices has connotations of knife which signifies danger.

Comment [p26]: Accentuates the danger involved in climbing.

Comment [p27]: Visual image of her being scared makes the reader feel sympathy.

Comment [p28]: This image emphasizes the danger as it shows how scared she is.

Comment [p29]: This image evokes sympathy for her lone struggle.

Occasionally on the smaller waves I would be thrown before I could hold on tight, and my body and the tools I carried were thrown away from the mast; I'd be hanging on by just one arm, trying to stop myself from smacking back into the rig.

By the third *spreader*⁵ I was exhausted; the halyard was heavier and the motion more violent. I held on to her spreader base and hung there, holding tight to breathe more deeply and conjure up more energy. But I realised that the halyard was tight and that it had caught on something. I knew that if I went down to free it I would not have the energy to climb up once again. I tugged and tugged on the rope – the frustration was unreal. It had to come, quite simply the rope had to come free. Luckily with all the pulling I managed to create enough slack to make it to the top, but now I was even more exhausted. I squinted at the grey sky above me and watched the mast-head whip across the clouds. The wind whistled past us, made visible by the snow that had began to fall. Below the sea stretched out for ever, the size and length of the waves emphasised by this new aerial view. This is what it must look like to the albatross.

I rallied once more and left the safety of the final spreader for my last hike to the top. The motion was worse than ever, and as I climbed I thought to myself, not far now, kiddo, come on, just keep moving... As the mast-head came within reach there was a short moment of relief; at least there was no giving up now I had made it – whatever happened now I had the whole mast to climb down. I fumbled at the top of the rig, feeding in the halyard and connecting the other end to the top of *Kingfisher's* mast. The job only took half an hour – then I began my descent. This was by far the most dangerous part and I had my heart in my mouth – no time for complacency now, I thought, not till you reach the deck, kiddo, it's far from over...

It was almost four hours before I called Mark back and I shook with exhaustion as we spoke. We had been surfing at well over 20 knots while I was up there. My limbs were bruised and my head was spinning, but I felt like a million dollars as I spoke on the phone. Santa had called on *Kingfisher* early and we had the best present ever – a new halyard.

Ellen MacArthur

¹*halyard*: a rope used for raising and lowering sails

²*sheet*: a line to control the sails

³*reef*: reduces area of sails

⁴*jumar*: a climbing device that grips the rope so that it can be climbed

⁵*spreader*: a bar attached to a yacht's mast

Comment [p30]: Emphasizes the danger and how extreme the situation is.

Comment [p31]: Visual imagery is used to signify the danger and the pain she would suffer if she fell – increases tension.

Comment [p32]: Creates an image of her helplessness and her exhaustion evoking sympathy

Comment [p33]: Straight to the point that something had gone wrong – increases tension.

Comment [p34]: On the verge of the fact that she may not be able to complete the task because the halyard is caught – increases tension and sympathy.

Comment [p35]: Telling herself that the rope has to free – she will be able to do it.

Comment [p36]: The rope incident had made her more exhausted meaning that the climb down will be harder and more dangerous.

Comment [p37]: The weather is getting colder and colder – more dangerous.

Comment [p38]: Emphasizes how high up she is as she is talking about how the bird would see the view of the sea.

Comment [p39]: Left the safety means that she is stepping out into the danger.

Comment [p40]: Accentuating danger – increases tension.

Comment [p41]: Talking to herself accentuates her loneliness

Comment [p42]: The fact that she is very close to the end gives the reader a sense of relief.

Comment [p43]: Sense of relief/achievement as she has made it halfway.

Comment [p44]: Most dangerous part emphasizes danger and increases tension.

Comment [p45]: This metaphor emphasizes how nervous she was therefore it increases tension.

Comment [p46]: Contrasts with the sense of relief as "it's far from over" creates tension. The ellipses

Comment [p47]: The statistic of how fast the boat was traveling gives the sense of achievement that she has done it.

Comment [p48]: Her pain and exhaustion contrasts with her relief and her achievement. The "but" shows how good she feels to have achieved it despite of the hardship of the climb.