

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 halyard 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 sheets or take a reef, 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 jumar 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. 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 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 begun 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

Comment [p1]: The 'I' personal pronouns show that she did it by alone, she decides everything.

Comment [p2]: Christmas eve implies that she is isolated and alone on Christmas day.

Comment [p3]: This emphasizes how complex her task is

Comment [p4]: This also shows Ellen's lone struggle

Comment [p5]: The confident tone of voice here shows Ellen's confidence and skill and that she knows what she's doing

Comment [p6]: Her tone of voice is very calm. She is very confident. In contrast to the situation since it is very dangerous, implies her skill and expertise

Comment [p7]: It shows that it is very DANGEROUS.

Comment [p8]: Simile that suggests how powerless she felt while she climbed the mast

Comment [p9]: The repetition of 'you' involves the reader but more importantly makes it clear how at the mercy of chance she is / you would be as this basically a list of all the things that she cannot do which you would normally need to do in order to sail safely

Comment [p10]: The DANGER of a Yacht race.

Comment [p11]: This shows that she has to make it right this one time since she is so exhausted already and doesn't think that she can do it. This also creates tension as we don't know if she will make it or not,

Comment [p12]: The certainty of Ellen's exhaustion, emphasises the tension

Comment [p13]: Repetition, reinforces the difficulty

Comment [p14]: This also shows that is going to get worse and worse and emphasises the tension since we don't know if she will make it to the finish line or not.

Comment [p15]: 'Clinging' shows the difficulty of her task and her fear – there is also something slightly childish in this emphasizing how she is weak and vulnerable and at the mercy of the elements

Comment [p16]: Childish vulnerability once again

Comment [p17]: All of these shows the DANGER of being out there by herself. Also this paragraph has a fast pace as it is a series of different things that happen with no time to reflect, which creates tension. Each paragraph here ends with a problem and not a resolution, which builds up tension and suggests the difficulty of her task

Comment [p18]: The short sentences and clauses build up to the climax

Comment [i19]: The but implies that something has happened to disturb the brief calm we felt at the start of this paragraph – it is used to create a tone change that introduces the problem of the halyard being stuck

Comment [i20]: Suggesting the disappointing failure of her task

Comment [i21]: The repetition and simple assertion of 'it had to come' shows Ellen's desperation and the frustration she is feeling to have come so far and nearly fail

Comment [K22]: Calmness here – the decrease in tension is to create a lull before the build up to the final climax and make the tension there more effective

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!...

Comment [i23]: This is the climax, this tension goes up again.

Comment [i24]: This sentence is short and thus creates a fast pace. Also the 'kiddo' implies that she is keeping herself strong and pushing herself more so that she wouldn't give up on her race.

Comment [i25]: Metaphor that implies the **DANGER** of changing the halyard.

Comment [i26]: The whole paragraph is the **CLIMAX** of this article. However, the final sentence and ellipses continues the tension

Comment [i27]: Shows how long replacing the halyard took

Comment [i28]: Speed here suggesting danger and again how little control she would have had over events

Comment [i29]: The 'but' emphasises the contrast between her exhaustion and sense of success

Comment [i30]: Simile again reinforcing the sense of success

Comment [i31]: The slow pace here suggests resolution and that the problem has been successfully solved

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

Genre: **Autobiographical** account and also to **inform**
Audience: General Audience (especially people who sail or adventure enthusiasts)
Purpose: **Informs** us about her experience, also to ***entertain*** us by creating tension

Organizing Principles

1. The danger of the situation she is in
2. Lone struggle against problems/obstacles
 - Exhaustion – 'one chance'
 - Out of control
 - Weather - windy and waves
3. Complex task
4. Sense of Success and relief
5. Confidence and skill of Ellen