

**STORY OF THE LEAP.**

I was a little leaf on yonder tree,  
And with my fellows spent the summer day.  
The hours were steadfast and they held us close.  
We filled our veins with sunshine, drank the dew  
To moonlight in the canopy of leaves  
Birds nested fearless, when their fledglings chirped.  
And strove to be the breeze prophesied  
A flight to lands, and freedom over sea.  
But veiled us, wind-swept clouds towered  
Over us.  
Or the blue heaven, an aerial gulf  
Lay vast above us. But below our crown,  
By bole and bough, men trod forever on,  
Whose eyes are never lifted to our heights.  
Whose feet pursue the unattainable.  
But one who lottored by the woodland path.  
When trees were moaning in the autumn  
Blasted from the depths of yonder tree.  
A little yellow leaf, that fell beneath  
Where men had trod, crushed in the  
Withered grass.  
Farting, unheeded, perishing alone!  
A sigh, or whisper from the sudden ground—  
That told the story of the little leaf!  
And he who lottored by the woodland path,  
Made question if the days of man were  
In Nature's wisdom with the yellow leaf?  
—Elizabeth Stoddard in the "Independent."

**"FLOTSAM."**

A STORY OF THE OCEAN.

Dawn at sea is the dreariest, bleakest, and most weird of effects which this wide world has to offer. I can conceive of nothing comparable to the sense of utter desolation produced upon the mind by the first sitting of the faint greenish streak upon the black eastern sky, and the gradual stealing out of the wide circle of the early twilight. So cold, so ashen, so unspeakably lonely does the ocean appear in the grey and ghostly glimmering. Of course, with the flashing of the armament into the wide splendor of morning, the aspect of nature changes as though by magic. But during the brief period which heralds the approach of sunrise at sea, the mind is subdued by a feeling almost of awe and sadness, such as no hour ashore could possibly exercise.

I recollect that, on the particular September morning which is the date of the opening of my story, I thought I had never beheld such a scene of solitude as was revealed by the breaking of the dawn. It was my watch on deck from four till eight, and here I may as well tell you at once that I was chief mate of the barque *Jessie* of London, and that my name is Stanley Gordon. We were deep in the heart of the Atlantic, lying-up on a sharp bowline to the brisk gushing of the southeast trade, with our jib-boom pointing fair for Cape Town, whither we were bound.

The small hours had been uncommonly dark, with a note of storm occasionally booming through the hoarse piping of the wind, that split into a thousand wild songs amidst the invisible rigging on high, and several times I had been on the verge of reducing sail, but kept all fast on recollecting that the barometer stood pretty high, and that we were in latitudes where the wind usually holds tolerably steady. The breeze lulled suddenly just before the eastern horizon commenced to open, and sunrise found the barque pitching with uncomfortable, jerky movements upon the heavy, foamless swell that came shouldering up as they weather-bow: nearly upright, and the short, oily wake astern plainly showing that she was doing nothing over four knots an hour.

"Going to be a calm presently, Mr. Gordon, think you?" said the voice of the skipper at my elbow. The men were leaning down, and in watching the buckets of water along the deck, but not a word came on deck.  
"Why, sir, I don't quite know what to make of the look of the weather. The sky has a sort of stony stare about it, so to speak, which I should reckon to mean more wind presently."  
"Or rain," he answered. "The glass don't give indications of anything dry."

Just then a man who was on the foreyard, doing some job or other up there, hailed the quarter-deck.  
"Halloo!" cried Captain Dudley. "There's a fat right ahead, sir, about four miles off. Looks to me to be something wrong aboard of her, as she don't seem to be heading on any particular course."  
We crossed to the bulwarks and peered ahead. Right in a line with our jib-boom end lay a small black object, looking to be upon the horizon from the comparatively low level of the barque's decks. The seaman on the foreyard must have had marvellous sight to detect anything uncommon in her appearance at that distance; to me she was just a little smudge against the dull gray of the sky. The skipper stepped to the companion hatch, and fetched the ship's glass from the rack. He levelled it, took a long stare, and then passed the telescope to me with the exclamation, "A derelict, or I'm mistaken!"

I pointed the tube, and after a short spell of searching, there leapt fair into the circle of winking waters a small brig, with her foretopmast gone, her sails in great confusion, and lying with her head right up in the wind's eye, all black. Whether she was abandoned or not, we were as yet too far distant to perceive. The spectacle of this disabled vessel sent a thrill through me. It was impossible to conjecture of what scenes of desolation and misery she had been, or might even still be, the little floating theatre. Few sailors can view a derelict in mid-ocean without emotion, and although this brig ahead was not a total wreck, yet her appearance was sufficiently forlorn to appeal to the mind as a tolerably complete picture of maritime distress.

We heard her slowly, and meant to see the captain and myself continued to gaze at her with a fascinated gaze, but she was very dark and stormy, and the vessel was pitching a great deal, but I was well seasoned now, and the noise and movement did not trouble me much. I got into my bunk and went to sleep. Presently I was awakened by a crash. You know how confused one's wits usually are on being suddenly awakened, and I lay for a few minutes before I gathered my senses together. I then sat up to listen, but heard nothing except the dull roaring of the wind and the booming of the waves against the crash that had aroused me being pretty well accustomed to all sorts of alarming noises by this time, and presently I fell asleep again. When I awoke it was daylight, and the sun shined in at my port-hole. I got up, dressed, and went on deck. To my astonishment the ship was deserted, the boats gone, and her mast broken. There was nothing in sight upon the sea, so far as I could see. That is all I can tell you.

"The only solution I can offer is that another ship must have been in collision with this vessel," said I, "and that the crew, fancying she was foundering, hastily abandoned her, and took refuge upon the other craft. Yet she shows no traces of having been run into. Anyhow, the seamen who manned this vessel must have been a noble set of fellows to have deserted her, leaving you to perish."

"They were towards—ruffians!" she exclaimed, with a little, angry stamp of her foot. Then changing her voice she said, "You belong to a ship somewhere near?"

"Aye, to the barque *Jessie*, lying hove-to within a mile. My captain sent me on board to overhaul this vessel. Lucky he did!"

"You are one of the officers?"

"Yes, miss. Stanley Gordon, chief mate at your service. May I inquire your name?"

"Violet Carey." After a pause, she continued, "Will you take me with you on board your ship?"

I was about to reply when my ear caught a muffled roaring sound, and now for the first time I observed that the heavens—as such of them as was visible through the square of the skylight—had turned black as ink. I said, "Excuse me a moment; I think a squall is coming down upon us," and clapping my cap onto my head, I sprang up the companion ladder. The instant I gained the deck, I beheld a white smother of wind and wet beating down upon us, not above a hundred yards away, churning the sea at its base into a race of froth. To leeward, the *Jessie* was cowering up her topgallant sails, and had a flag flying at her peak, doubtless as a signal of recall. I sprang to the bulwark to look for the boat, she had gone adrift, and was blowing away at the distance of a cable's length from the brig. I made a funnel of my hands, and roared through them to the fellows in her. They heard me and turned their heads, and one of them held up an oar with which he was sculling over the stern. I guessed the rest. They had lost the other oar overboard, and cast of the painter to pick it up, and now the wind and the sea of the waves were drifting the little quarter-boat away.

But even in the brief instant in which I stood thus gazing, the squall was brooding through the rigging of the brig, and the wet blowing along like clouds of steam, hissing sharply upon the decks. The vessel was under top-sail and forecourse, and under the pressure of these spaces of canvas she heeled over, and yet over. They heard me and turned their heads, and one of them held up an oar with which he was sculling over the stern. I guessed the rest. They had lost the other oar overboard, and cast of the painter to pick it up, and now the wind and the sea of the waves were drifting the little quarter-boat away.

"Where is your ship?" said she. "We have lost sight of her in the thickness of this squall. The weather will be clearing again presently, and then we shall sight her afresh. Won't you go below? You will be drenched to the skin if you remain on deck."

"I sprang to the wheel and put it hard up," exclaimed, with a little, angry stamp of her foot. Then changing her voice she said, "You belong to a ship somewhere near?"

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"I will go and put on my mackintosh," she disappeared and presently emerged again, clad in a waterproof, and bearing a seaman's oilskin over-alls, which she extended to me. "Put this on; it will keep you dry," said she. I was grateful for the little act of attention, and proceeded to swathe myself in the painted coat. The sea was beginning to rise under the furious rush of the wind, but as yet the waves were nothing to take notice of. I eyed the masts anxiously, not knowing but that they might have been damaged beyond the mere breaking

off of the fore-topmast. But although the sails were swollen rigid as iron to the wet pouring of the blast, the spars seemed to stand the strain staunchly enough.

"I continued to grasp the wheel and keep an amidship helm. It seemed to me, after we had been scudding in this fashion for about a quarter of an hour, that instead of abating, the wind, which increased in violence, and the atmosphere remained thick as a feather-bed with the clouds of wet driving along. The girl sat down on the grating just abaft the wheel, and we continued to talk. I said I was surprised that the men should have abandoned the brig so readily, seeing what a valuable freight she carried, and how trifling the damage was. She answered that she supposed they hurried away in a panic.

"But," said she, "since the damage is so slight, as you say, wouldn't it be a pity to desert the poor old Wanderer? How far off is the nearest port?"

"Buenos Ayres will be about 500 miles west-south-west from here. It is not my intention to abandon the brig. I was sent on board to report whether she was sound and tight, with a view to carrying her to the nearest port. When the weather moderates, we will communicate with my ship, into which you can transfer if you wish, and Captain Dudley will send three or four men on board to help navigate the Wanderer."

"Where is your vessel bound?"

"Cape Town. You could easily take steamer there for England."

"When is it going to clear up?" she asked, rising and shaking a shower of rattling raindrops on her mackintosh. "If this storm is going to last, we may be blown out of sight of your ship."

"I was just beginning to fear the same thing. I answered, noticing with admiration the length of her hair, which being loose streamed in the wind in situous, chestnut folds. A thought entered my head. I said, "Are you not hungry or thirsty?"

"I have not had any breakfast yet," she replied, "but there is plenty of food and drink in the little pantry downstairs."

In this wise we chatted. As time went on, and the weather showed no signs of clearing, I began to feel a trifle anxious. Unless the sea were making a free wind of it like ourselves, the pace at which we were surging through the seas would soon carry us out of the sphere of her horizon. I wondered whether the two men in the boat had succeeded in fetching the barque, because if not their chances of keeping their tiny fabric afloat in such a sea as was beginning to mount would be small. Running dead before it as we were took much of the spite out of the wind and enabled us to carry the canvas which the brig had been under when I boarded her. But to have allowed the course, so as to bring the weight of the blow abeam, would have been as much as the spars were worth, and I durst not leave the wheel to start any halliards or sheets lest the vessel should broach-to.

It might have been about nine o'clock when the first of this dirty weather burst down upon us, and not until after the hour of noon did it show any signs of mending. Miss Carey had brought me a plate of salt beef and some ship's biscuits, along with a mug of sherry and water, and I contrived to make something of a meal, although the sea was running heavily. The helm kicked viciously, and needed close attention to prevent the brig coming to. The wind was about north, with a touch of easterly in it, and therefore our course was willy-nilly the westwards of south-westly. As I have said, the blinding smother continued to shroud the ocean to within pistol-shot of us until past noon, by which time I guessed we could not have run less than five-and-twenty miles; it then suddenly ceased to rain, and the horizon opened for a league around. I anxiously swept the sea with my sight, but there was nothing in view. The wind lost none of its violence with this clearing of the weather, the heavens were dark with low-lying vapor, and the gale looked like lasting.

"No signs of your ship," said the girl, shading her eyes with a delicate little hand and scanning the circle around.

"Not yet. We cannot see more than three miles on every side, and it would be strange indeed if we had not run more than that distance apart in all this time. It will clear still further presently, I expect, and then we may sight her."

"And suppose we don't?"

"Then, so far as I can see, we shall not be very badly off. We have a good staunch hull under our feet—at least, she seems sound enough—with plenty of provisions below, and we are in a well-navigated ocean, where ships are abundant."

"I wish I could relieve you at the wheel," said she. "My dear young lady, the kick of the spokes would flog you to the deck. I can manage very well for the present; but if a very heavy sea is going to mount presently, we must try and heave-to, at the risk of losing our spars. Fortunately, the wind is fair for the South American coast."

"Aye, it's not my intention to quit the ship until her anchor is down in port. We have been blown so far to the westwards that I look upon the chances of our falling in with the *Jessie* as very small now. I shall make up my mind to continue running. The wind is dropping fast, and it will presently be quite safe for me to leave the helm."

"No, I remained at the wheel until the dusk of evening was fast changing into the obscurity of night, by which time the stars were shining brightly over our mastsheads, and the wind was no more than a stiff breeze. I then secured the helm amidships, and stood aside to watch whether the vessel would continue to run without attention. To my satisfaction I found that the amount of head-sail she carried held her as true as a hair before the wind. The side-lights were in their screens, but had burnt out, however, after rummaging awhile in the galley, I found a can of oil, and trimmed and lighted them.

"Now," said I, throwing off the oil-skin overall I had worn all day, "I think we may leave the ship to take care of herself for a little while, Miss Carey, and go below and rest."

Without a moment's hesitation she led the way to the companion and descended. I followed. A swing lamp was stung under the skylight, which I lighted.

"If you will excuse me, I will go to my cabin for a few minutes," said the girl, passing her hand over her long tresses of hair. "Really, my appearance must be quite disgraceful!"

She vanished through the little passage, and thinking I might find a few conveniences in the captain's or mate's cabin, I went exploring, and the first door I opened proved to be that of the skipper's berth. Here I refreshed myself, exchanged the wet jacket I wore for a decent-looking pea-coat, looking against the bulkhead, and made myself as presentable as the means at my disposal would admit. I then returned to the cabin, and was almost immediately rejoined by the young lady. She had removed her mackintosh and had, twisted her hair into a pile upon the top of her head, and mounted by a comb, and now—perhaps because I had more leisure than heretofore to observe her—I seemed suddenly to discover that she was a very pretty young woman. She noted my change of attire, and said, with a smile,

"I am glad to see you have been making yourself at home. I will go and get the materials for a meal."

Whilst she was putting some food upon the table, I stepped on deck for a few moments, and found the brig still running all right; the weather continued to moderate, and the night grew but clear for a league ahead. The side-lights burnt brightly, and no vessel in the neighborhood could fail to see us.

We sat down to quite a sumptuous meal, evidently furnished forth from delicacies shipped specially by the Calcutta merchant for the use of his daughter. The girl was in good spirits, and chatted much to me about her home in India and such-like matters. It was a queer situation, and one which well illustrates the vicissitudes of a sailor's life. I felt weird. Apart from the fact that I had been up since four o'clock in the morning, it had been a most fatiguing day for me, standing at the wheel, and steering the brig throughout the height of the gale. The young lady, too, told me she had scarcely closed her eyes during the two nights in which she had been alone on board the Wanderer.

"It will not be safe for me to leave the brig entirely to herself," said I, "so I shall make a bed for myself at the foot of the companion-ladder, in order that I can be up and down at intervals during the night."

"But it will be very uncomfortable for you, Mr. Gordon," said she. I laughed, and answered that people in our plight mustn't trouble too much about comfort. Shortly after the she groined with a little yawning, and bidding me good-night, added that she should sleep with a feeling of security tonight, and went to her berth. I stepped



"No signs of your ship," said the girl.

ped on deck to take a last look around, and found all well; the brig bowling along with much seething of foam all about her sides, rolling in regular swaying motions, and holding her course with scarcely a couple of points of yawing. On this I returned below, and going to the captain's cabin, dragged the mattress from the bunk, and was about to make myself a shake-down upon it, when, recollecting that Miss Carey had told me she had died of cholera, I dropped the thing as if I had been stung, and went and lay down upon one of the lockers, using my jacket as a pillow.

Hard and uncomfortable as my bed was, I slept well—that is to say, for a sailor. Several times during the night I was up and down. The morning broke fine and clear, with a smart breeze, which showed a tendency to veer into the southeast, the proper quarter for the trade wind. There was nothing in sight, although I mounted, as high as the main cross-trees, when it was light enough to see the horizon around, and swept the sea with my sight. But, in truth, I was not very much concerned by this discovery, for already I had formed some tolerably definite notions of the practicability of navigating the brig to Buenos Ayres single-handed, always supposing, of course, that the weather favored me. I gathered in the slack of the braces, which were allowing the yards too much play, shifted the wheel by a spoke or so, and returned to the cabin,

where I found Miss Carey, looking wonderfully fresh and pretty, engaged in getting some breakfast. She inquired if my ship was in sight, and I said, "No, I did not suppose she would be. We have been running dead on the American coast right through the night, and have made great progress." And then, whilst we sat down to eat, I told her of my scheme to carry the ship to port single-handed.

It was bright and clear at noon on this day, and I succeeded in getting an observation by the aid of a sextant I found in the captain's cabin, making our position to be 37 deg. 20 min. S., and about 45 deg. W., for the chronometer had stopped, and I had only my watch to go by. I set course for the mouth of the Rio de la Plata, but this change of direction brought the wind more abeam, and I found the vessel would not steer herself as she had done whilst running. This was awkward, as unless the breeze shifted again, it meant I should have to stand at the wheel all the time.

But our troubles were nearer ending than I had supposed, for, at about four o'clock this same afternoon, we sighted the smoke of a steamer coming up astern; and a couple of hours later a British man-of-war, on surveying service, lay floating within hailing distance of us. A boat put off, and a lieutenant stepped on board. I told him my story, and after he had looked at the brig's papers, he said his captain would gladly lend me half a dozen men to carry the brig to Buenos Ayres, whither they themselves were bound. And, to cut this part of my narrative short, half an hour later we were buzzing merrily along in the wake of the war-ship, with a couple of hands aloft loosing the main-royal, and the foam sluicing into cataraacts astern.

Three days later I brought the Wanderer to anchor off the city of Buenos Ayres, close alongside H. M. S. C—, which had arrived the night before. Miss Carey and myself immediately went ashore, and after the British Consul, who received us very pleasantly and promised us any assistance in his power that we might need, the young lady cabled to her father a brief account of the disaster which had befallen his ship, stating that the vessel was safe and sound at Buenos Ayres, in my charge, and that she herself proposed proceeding to England by steamer. On the following day came back the reply: "Arrange with the gentleman to carry Wanderer to Liverpool, and go in her yourself."

I was willing enough to undertake the job, and Miss Carey said she would sooner go home in the brig than have to wait a fortnight for the next steamer. There was no trouble in shipping a crew, as Buenos Ayres seemed full of seamen out of employment. I found that the rules of the service precluded the men-of-war from who had assisted me from making any claim for salvage, so, on our arrival, I made each of them a substantial gift from a bag of money I had discovered in the captain's cabin, making a note of the circumstance in the log-book. Whilst we lay at Buenos Ayres, I had such repairs executed as were necessary, and a week later, with a fair wind, a stout ship, and a good crew, we got under way, and put to sea.

Our voyage home was uneventful enough, lasting just one month to the day. At least, when I say it was uneventful, I mean that it was productive of nothing in the shape of maritime adventure; but to me it proved very eventful, to be sure, for long before the Wanderer arrived in the Mersey, Violet Carey and I were in love with one another. I never put in any claim for salvage of the ship, for the reason that eventually old Mr. Carey settled £10,000 upon his daughter and me; gave us his blessing, and said that I ought to consider myself very lucky fellow; which I certainly did, and, thank God, have never yet found occasion to change my opinion.—Herbert Russell, in *The Strand*.

THE END.

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