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THE STEWARDESS' STORY.

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

It was Christmas eve. I was spending it not in the sweet circle round the home fireside, but in the saloon of a Southward bound steamer, where there was nothing to remind one of the blessed season of peace and good will save a solitary cross of evergreen which one passenger had fastened over her stateroom door. It was a wild night. We were just off Cape Hatteras, and the vessel was rolling like a plaything in the hands of the stormy sea. A violent snowstorm was raging, and on deck the scene was dreary and Arctic. Snow and ice covered everything, and the muffled forms of the sailors passing to and fro under the glare of the lanterns appeared like the weird ghosts of dead Arctic voyagers. I was glad to seek the warm saloon and gather myself into a corner of a lounge.

To watch the movements of the passengers was amusement enough, and served to prevent me from thinking too tenderly of the home circle where I was missed from the festivities of Christmas eve.

The actual event was collected which one always sees on a steamer Southward bound in the winter time. Here around a table were gathered a group of men, probably sugar merchants, striving, in spite of the motion of the ship, to play a quiet game of euchre. Stretched on the sofas were several of the ship's crew, some of whom were sleeping peacefully. A few children not yet put to bed were crumpling on the floor with their nurses, and in a warm corner near the heater lay a poor consumptive girl, carefully watched over by her mother and brother. She was going to die under the strange surroundings of the old story repeated over and over again every winter.

Moving round among all those who were sick was the trim, plump figure of the old stewardess. She was carrying bowls of broth, and all these little delicacies were welcome to a sufferer from seasickness. The quiet, placid face of the old lady interested me, and in those few days already passed since leaving port we had become firm friends. With the quick instinct of a woman who had had to do with all kinds of people, she felt that I liked her company, and she had already formed the habit of coming for a quiet chat with me the last thing at night after all her senic charges were safely tucked in their berths and her duties for the day over.

I was impatient to-night for her leisure hour to arrive, for I saw a strange tenderness in the old lady's face, and felt sure that the season was drawing to a close. I had a feeling that perhaps I could induce her to tell me. So when at last she came and sat down on the end of the lounge where I was lying, I said, trying to lead the conversation to what I felt was uppermost in her mind: "It's a rough night for Christmas eve."

"Yes, ma'am," she replied, smoothing the folds of the kerchief across her breast; "but I've been many a rougher night at sea in my day, and—thoughtfully—sadder Christmas eves, too."

"Have you spent many years on the ocean?"

"Yes, ma'am, but not in this way. I used to have my own little cabin in my husband's ship—a cozy little place, where I used to be always at the side, and never felt afraid of storm nor wind."

"Tell me about it," I said. "Surely a life like yours has much of interest in it."

"Well, ma'am, I've been thinking it all over to-night, and if you don't mind, I'll tell you some of the things that happened to me. I hadn't much knowledge of those things when I married Charlie, for I was a slip of a girl and knew no more of the sea than one learns in watching the vessel's behavior."

Charlie had bought me for his wife and gone to sea with him, although he was young, he had a slip of his own—I said yes with all my heart, for I loved the honest hearted fellow, ma'am, ever since we were little children together. I only thought then of the good about, and to go to sea with him was to me like a trip to paradise. Well, we were married just before he was to start on a voyage to Brazil. I mind me so well of that day, ma'am, just as if it all happened yesterday. It was late in November when we started, and right here we had a terrible gale. I frightened when the wind howled and wished myself back in the old days, when God blessed my memory! I held my dear little baby, and I tried to wipe away the tears which came down her cheeks.

When the wind blew the wild, Charlie only laughed, and at last I myself to sleep in his arms like a dazed child.

And when we came down into the tropic seas I was so happy watching the schools of flying fish and the floating fields of gulf weed; and at night, when the sea was shining and a ship seemed passing through a lake of silver, all my dreams of paradise were realized.

"Then came the foreign land, with strange, swarthy faces, and words I didn't know, and odd fruits, and all manner of queer things. Charlie was tired of bringing me new and quaint trinkets, and I made my little fancy as a Chinese toyshop.

We came home from that voyage, little Minnie was born. She was a blue eyed baby, and I was so anxious for her comfort I persuaded her to stay at home with her mother, and he went on the next day alone.

"But I couldn't bear it; so when he came home again, I begged him to let me go back to my home in the little cabin. He had found it desolate enough without me, so he said, and we went again together.

"This voyage we lay a long time in the Brazilian port, and before we sailed

for home, another baby was in my arms. We called her Pepita, after our dear old ship, and it was hard to say which the sailors petted the most, the ship or the baby.

"All went well with us until we were within three days' sail of New York, and then a terrible storm came on. It was in the winter, and for eight long days we tossed at the mercy of the tempest. It was an awful time, ma'am. Charlie didn't laugh then; and although he tried to speak cheerful words, I could see he was almost wild with anxiety. I'll never forget that time, when I sat day and night on the cabin floor, with Minnie in my arms, listening to the waves crashing against the ship as if every moment must be our last. The sailors would come down now and then for a drop of hot coffee and to warm their hands, for everything on deck was covered with ice. They didn't talk to the heart, poor fellows, to speak to the children, and I saw more than one tear on their rough cheeks when they looked at them, and Pepita would smile and stretch out her little hands in her unconscious way to us after all. In the evening of the eighth day the wind changed, and we drifted into calmer waters. If it hadn't been for the east wind blowing, we might just as well have drifted the other way, for the next morning when Charlie rushed into the cabin and almost carried me in his arms to the door. There I saw, gleaming through the fog, two great shining lights. They were like angels' eyes looking from heaven to me. I've passed those shining lights many a time since, ma'am. I've seen them in soft summer evenings and clear spring mornings, but I never see them without my whole heart going out in thanksgiving and praise. No one to whom they were not shown as they did to me that night on the ocean, I consented to stay behind, standing there on the headland and pointing to heaven.

"Well, we saw the lights from other vessels all around us, and at daybreak a tug was alongside taking our forlorn, nearly wrecked ship up the harbor, and before night I laid Pepita in my mother's arms.

"After that, Charlie wouldn't hear to my going to sea again. He said he could bear anything if the children were not suffering too; so, for the sake of my little ones, I consented to stay behind. Charlie bought a little cottage on the Jersey coast, where I could overlook the sea, and I settled down quietly to take care of the children while he went his voyages.

"He kept on going to Brazil and back for a long time. Twice I left the children with another woman, and went with him, for it hurt me to pass all my time away from Charlie's side. So every time I went well with us. We owned our cottage and a bit of a garden, where mother and Minnie used to pass long summer days weeding and watering and tending the beds of poppies and marigolds, and the old-fashioned flowers that were so dear to her. I loved the sea, and would leave Minnie to take care of the garden, and go and sit for hours on the beach watching the waves tumble in among the stones and beat against the rocks of the cliff. When Charlie came home she would look at me and see how far down the road, and I'll never forget how her pretty face used to look as she would come dancing up the garden path pulling him with both her hands, and he laughing and calling her all manner of tender names.

"Those were happy days, ma'am, and I'm sure there never was a happier family than the one gathered round our little table while Charlie was at home.

"We had saved a good bit of money, too, for Charlie wasn't like some sailors, who spend everything about when they are on shore. Every penny we could spare he laid by for the little girls; for they were always little girls to him, and always will be.

"But our day of anxiety was to come. An opportunity was offered Charlie to go on a long voyage to the East Indies. The chance was a good one, and he was good to be thrown away; so he sold the Pepita, which was getting to be an old ship, and went off as half owner of another bark, the Arago. It was hard to let him go for so long a time. South America seemed like home, but the East Indies was a new world. He was so full of hope that he tried to go off in his usual jolly way, kissing Minnie and telling her she would be a little woman when he came back—she was fourteen then—and promising Pepita no end of curious things from the foreign lands; and when he came and put his arm around me and said: 'Keep up your courage, Meggie; I'll soon be back, I couldn't look at him. I hid my face in my hands and sobbed like a baby.

"After he was gone we settled back into the old ways; the children went to school, and mother and I kept the house tidy. But I was uneasy; I didn't dare to say anything to trouble the girls, but I never lay down at night without dreaming of shipwreck, and when the time came when we could expect news from Charlie, it seem as if my heart would burst with anxiety. My news never came. Day after day we wait, and little by little a sad silence settled down on our cottage. When word would come of the arrival of ships which sailed long after Charlie's did, we would look in each other's faces and never speak a word, but each knew what sorrow was in the other's heart. Only little Pepita never gave up. 'My father will come back; my father will come back,' she used to say, until I couldn't bear to hear her, because I couldn't believe it; and when she used to stand for hours and stare at the water, it drove me almost wild, because I knew what she was watching for.

"A summer and winter and another summer had passed since Charlie went away, and when Christmas came round again I laid my poor mother in the churchyard, and she went back alone with my children to the cottage.

"How I got through the next year, ma'am, I can never tell. As I look back it appears like an awful dream, but I do

THE WORST OF CALAMITIES.

Three Hundred Pleasure Seekers Burned Alive—The Horrors of the Burning of the Brooklyn Theater.

By the Brooklyn Theater the sacrifice of life was terrible. Three hundred people miserably perished in the smoke and flames. The large majority of them were young men and boys; only a few women and children suffered death so far as known. Most of those lost were occupants of the gallery, or third tier of the theater. In descending the stairway they were met on the second landing or second tier of the theater by a blinding and suffocating volume of smoke, and fell in heaps on the stairway.

"I don't know how it all was; I know I couldn't move. I saw as in a dream Charlie in the room and Pepita's arms around his neck; then I fell on his shoulder like one dead.

"There are no words to tell you, ma'am, of the joy and happiness we knew in our little cottage that Christmas day. We couldn't realize it ourselves. I didn't dare to take my eyes from Charlie for a moment, lest I should look back and find him gone. Minnie and Pepita both sat clinging to him. He had a long story to tell us of shipwreck upon shipwreck, of long waiting upon lonely islands, watching month after month for sails which seemed never to come—adventures through which many a poor sailor has passed, and from which many a one has never come back to tell the story as Charlie did.

"That night, sitting by the fire after the children had left us alone, I made Charlie promise me that he would never leave me again, but would give up the sea and stay with us in the cottage.

"I didn't realize till long afterward how hard it had been for him to promise me that. I had a feeling that the terror of the sea that I couldn't realize how a sailor's heart delighted in it. When years had passed, and Minnie and Pepita had both married and left us alone, I began to feel how hungry Charlie was for the little cottage and the few who must have been trampled down and suffocated near the lobby.

The fire had spread with astonishing rapidity from the proscenium to the ceiling of the dome, and the black smoke, drawn by a draft like a steady wind, rolled in upon the galleries and added another terror to the gasping men and women who, still free from the jam on the stairway, dropped to the parquet floor to perish in the heat and smoke. The passing vessels and more than one of the lobby stairs leading to the dress circle, and sometimes he would sit on the cliff for hours with his eyeglass, watching the passing vessels, and more than once I heard him sigh as if his heart was bursting; but I would never listen when he spoke of going to sea again, until at last his health began to fail, and it seemed there was nothing for him but to let him go and let me die. But I couldn't bear to let him go, and he couldn't bear to leave me behind. We were both too old to begin life over in the long trading voyages; and as Charlie had the offer of the place of first mate on this ship—the captain is an old friend of his, ma'am—I got the situation as stewardess, and for five years Charlie and I have been traveling back and forth together, and we will continue to do it as long as God gives us health and strength to bear the journey."

The old lady stopped and looked hesitatingly at me and at some other passengers who had gathered round to listen, as if she feared we were wearied by her long family history.

I hastened to reassure her by thanks for the pleasant way she had entertained us during the long Christmas eve at sea.

"And so Charlie is really on board with you?" I said.

"Oh, yes, ma'am," she replied, smiling. "I would not be here without him. Did you mind the man who was speaking to me at the cabin door to-night—the tall, stout man with a gray beard? Yes, you saw him, did you? That was Charlie."

Winter Furs and Their Prices.

The most splendid and costly furs are Russian sable, sea otter and black and silver fox. The Russian sable is the finest of all the martens, and, since it is not very prolific, its skins are costly. The best and darkest are obtained in Yakootsk, Kamtschatka and Russian Lapland.

A pair of "crown Russian sable" is now worth in New York from \$100 down to \$200. Sets (by which is meant a muff and box) of sable not of the very highest quality cost \$500 to \$550. Sets of sea otter are valued at \$150 to \$250, and sets of black and silver fox at \$100 to \$250. These high priced furs are bought only by the rich, and are not generally fashionable.

A chinchilla muff and a box cost from \$50 to \$60.

New York and Canada minks are the which once were sold for \$125 to \$150, can now be bought for \$100. The fur of a skunk, described by trade as the Alaska sable, and suddenly popularized a few years ago, is still in fashion and sells at from \$20 to \$25 the set.

The most beautiful seal skin sacks (though perhaps not the most durable), made of pup Shetlands' skin, sell for \$200. The best Alaska seals bring \$125 to \$250. Seal sacks, American dried, can be bought for \$50, \$90 and \$100.

Sidlienne sacks and dolmans are lined with the skins of Siberian squirrels, whose beautiful gray backs and lighter colored bellies make a pretty shifting contrast. Such sacks by trade are called squirrel edging, are set off by fancy oxidized clasps, and are fixed at \$125 to \$160.

A young man in Bridgeport, Conn., pulled back so hard, when his companions hauled him up to the bar to drink, that one of his arms was broken. The truth of the story is vouched for by the Bridgeport newspapers.

THE SUICIDE OF A CONVICT WHOSE WIFE HAD APPLIED FOR A DIVORCE.

The Hartford Times says: The quiet of the Connecticut State prison, at Wethersfield, was broken one morning recently by the discovery that one of the convicts had hanged himself. In the cell of John Lee Powell the officers discovered his dead but not entirely cold body, hanging by a rope that was fastened to a spike near the ceiling, that was used to fasten up the bed against the wall in the daytime. One end of the rope had been made into a running noose, and this was around his neck. The height of the spike was not sufficient to suspend him clear of the floor if he stood upright, and he had bent up his knees to make sure work of it. He was promptly cut down, but life could not be restored.

John Lee Powell was in his thirty-ninth year. He came of a good family in the town of Trumbull, in Fairfield county, his father having been a member of the Legislature and a prominent and esteemed citizen. He lived at Stepien Depot.

He was said to have been not a bad man at heart, and was led into the commission of the crime for which he was sentenced (placing a tie across the track of the Housatonic railroad) by the bantering wags of some companions, when intoxicated. The act resulted in no accident, but the offense is a serious one, and the conviction of Powell, on the twenty-seventh of August, 1875, was immediately followed by his sentence to prison for a term of twenty years. He had a wife, ten years younger than himself, and two children; and he fondly loved his family. During his imprisonment his wife more than once visited the prison, and assured him of her fidelity. Two months ago Powell's father died, and the news saddened the son in his lonely imprisonment.

A few weeks ago a legal document, in the shape of his wife's petition for a divorce, came to Powell in prison from the Fairfield county superior court. This formal notice, in which the blanks in the printed form were filled out with the names of himself, his wife and his two children, was wholly unexpected by the prisoner and utterly overwhelmed him. He grew daily more and more dejected, and reached a condition which compelled him to give up work. He had been a carriage maker and was an expert workman; and with the contractors who obtained his work in prison he was in favor, as he was with Warden Hewes and the officers, none of whom had ever occasion to use a harsh word to him.

In his pocket was found the legal form of the wife's divorce petition, which had been secured on him as a legal formality. Between the open printed lines he had written in a clear hand in pencil these farewell messages to his wife and family:

"Oh, my dear wife! Is this the way you treat your poor Lee? I certainly can't tell what this is for. I tell you truly, for the last time, that I love you with all my heart. You are too cruel. I die for you. Good-bye forever. Good-bye, little Irvie. Poor papa will never see you again on earth. Good-bye, Charlie, Katie and mother. Don't think me too rash for I can't live and have Letitia leave me. Charlie, come and get me and take me home, and lay me by the side of my poor father. Tell father and mother Burr and Henry good-bye for me.

"As wicked as I have been, I never could serve you in this way. I thought it was hard to be shut up here, but it is nothing to this. You are too cruel. How many good times we have had together. I always knew your heart was hard, but I never thought it was as hard as it is now. You was untrue to me in the first, and now the last."

How the Main Building was Sold.

"Now," said Mr. Ellis, the auctioneer who sold the Centennial buildings, "let us begin with the Main building. It cost \$1,600,000. We bids \$1,000,000; \$750,000; \$500,000; \$200,000; \$900,000? What is bid?" A long, silent pause, but no bid. "What are we going to do?" At last there came a bid—one of \$200,000, from R. J. Dobbins, who erected the building—\$200,000 we have; two hundred thousand—\$200,000 we have; going at two—\$400,000 we have; another bid. What is it? \$250,000; going, going, are you all done? \$250,000, once; \$250,000, twice; \$250,000, three times. Is there no other bid? [Turns to Mr. John Welsh, who is interrogating point in his eye.] Going—once; going—twice; going—three times—gone!" Down went the hammer and up stepped Mr. John S. Motion, who gave the name of the International Exhibition Company as the purchaser. This building is therefore not to be removed, being intended to contain the proposed Permanent Exhibition.

The Bible.

A missionary, writing from the island of Mangasia, South Pacific, reports that the island is now a land of Bibles. Not only the heads of every household are in possession of a copy, but nearly every child upon the island has one. He tells of the case of a poor old native who was indefatigable in his endeavors to secure a copy for each member of his household. He brought the missionary all the money he had, then he tried to make up the price in coconuts oil, and lastly, rather than fall short, he sold the only young cow he had to pay for them.

Heaven help the poor; the rich can visit their relatives.

ROMANCE OF A BOOT HEEL.

An Old Railroader's Thrilling Story—The Perils of Frogs in the Track.

While two men, employees of the Ohio and Mississippi railroad company, were on their way to their work in the cars of the company at Aurora, Ind., their attention was attracted by a boot heel, freshly torn off, sticking in the "frog" of the railroad track, a short distance from the shops. They stopped a moment to examine it, and found that the heel was so securely fastened in the "frog" that it required a smart blow with a crutch (one of the men had lost a leg) to remove it. Long nails protruded from the heel, and all the evidence went to show that it had taken a considerable effort to tear it from the boot. "It appears to me," said one of the men, "that some fellow has had a narrow escape from being run down by a train; or else he has been badly frightened and wrenched his boot heel off when there was no occasion for it."

"It reminds me," replied his companion, in a low tone, "of a little adventure that happened to me several years ago up on the Pan Handle road. I was then a young man, but it isn't likely that I'll ever forget it," and he cast a rueful glance at the empty leg of his pants. The story is soon told. The snow and wind blowing over in his hand as if to find inscribed upon it a story similar to his own. "I was walking on the track near Cadiz Junction, in Ohio. It was one dark and blustery night in February, and a heavy snowstorm was prevailing at the time. The snow and wind blowing over in my face was almost sufficient to have blinded one had it been broad daylight. I was walking briskly along, not dreaming of any harm—in fact, sir, I was then returning from a visit to my sweetheart, who had that evening promised to be my wife—when suddenly I found my foot fastened between two rails of a side track joined the main track, just as our heel was fastened in the frog here at our feet. At that moment I heard the shrill whistle of a locomotive, and looking up the track I saw, through the blinding snow, a light bearing down on me. I had passed the frog a few minutes previous and had noticed several persons standing on the platform. The persons were waiting for a train, and here was one coming! It was an unusual hour for a train, and the idea of meeting one had not occurred to me before. I saw the awful truth, dashed upon me. I made a desperate effort to release my foot, and the horror of my situation was increased a hundred fold when I found that it was securely fastened between the rails. The light was so close that its reflection upon the new fallen snow blinded me. I was in a situation like that in an instant. I thought of my aged parents, of events of my past life, of my promised bride; and the thought that I should be torn from her, or what was worse, that she should be torn from me, was infinitely more dreadful than the thought of death. But I'll not trouble you with these painful details. What I supposed to be the headlight of a locomotive was blazing right in my face. It was this light that fastened," he said, swinging his leg, "my foot in the frog. I just threw myself!"

"Yes, you," replied his companion, with blanched cheeks, "you threw yourself to one side and the engine severed your leg from your body!"

"Not exactly," returned the story teller, smiling blandly upon his victim. "The truth is, I am a man with a good deal to say that the light did not proceed from a locomotive, but from the lantern of a watchman who happened to be coming down the track."

"And the shrill whistle that you heard?"

"That, I presume, came from a one-horse sawmill not far off."

"But your leg—how did you lose that?"

"As many another brave man has lost his," came the answer, accompanied by a heavy sigh, and a far-away look as if to recall the scene of some field of battle; "I fell under a moving machine and had it chopped off."

"Well, all I have to say," replied his companion, somewhat disgusted at the turn the romance had taken against him, "all I have to say is that I hope your girl went back on you and married an ax handle maker or some one else who could make her happy."

"She stuck to me," said the romancer, "stuck to me through good and evil report, and married me—married me one rapturous evening in the merry month of May, and now," and his voice grew husky with emotion, "and now I live the top of this bald and beelling pate if she hadn't!"

A PLANTER.—A stranger said in New Orleans: "I learn that Messrs. Wells and Anderson of the returning board are planters. I did not know about the others. Is Mr. Casenave a planter?" "Yes," said the gentleman addressed, "you can call him a planter, but what he plants never comes up. He is more plainly speaking an undertaker."

It is a singular fact that when men bet hats on the election the winner always understands that it was a \$9 silk hat, while the loser is equally convinced that a \$2 felt hat was implied.

HEAVEN HELP THE POOR; THE RICH CAN VISIT THEIR RELATIVES.

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