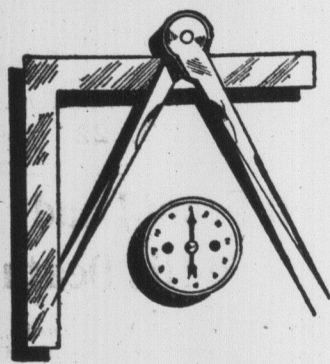


The Pandora Thermometer



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The Wings of the Morning

By LOUIS TRACY

Down in the saloon the rarer passengers were striving to subdue the hum of an interval before they sought their cabins. Some talked. One hardened reprobate strummed the piano. Others played cards, chess, draughts, anything that would distract attention. The stately apartment offered strange contrast to the warring elements without. Bright lights, costly upholstery, soft carpets, carved panels and gilded cornices, with uniformed attendants passing to and fro carrying coffee and glasses—these surroundings suggested a floating palace in which the raging seas were defied. Yet forty miles away, somewhere in the furious depths, four corpses drifted about with horrible uncertainty, lurching through battling currents and perchance convoyed by fighting sharks.

The surgeon had been called away. Iris was the only lady left in the saloon. She watched a set of whist players for a time and then essayed the perilous passage to her stateroom. She found her maid and a stewardess there. Both women were weeping. "What is the matter?" she inquired. "The stewardess tried to speak. She choked with grief and hastily went. The maid blubbered an explanation."

"A friend of hers was married, miss, to the man who is drowned."

"Drowned? What man?"

"Haven't you heard, miss? I suppose they are keeping it quiet. An English sailor and some natives were swept off the ship by a sea. One native was saved, but he is all smashed up. The others were never seen again."

"In by degrees learned the and chronicles of the Jackson family. She was moved to tears. She remembered the doctor's hesitancy and her own side phrase, 'a large coffin'.

Outside the roaring waves pounded upon the iron walls. Two staterooms had been converted into one to provide Miss Deane with ample accommodation. There were no bunks, but a cozy bed was screwed to the deck. She lay down and strove to read. It was a difficult task. Her eyes wandered from the printed page to mark the absurd antics of her garments swinging on their hooks. At times the ship rolled so far that she felt sure it must topple over. She was not afraid, but subdued, rather astonished, placidly prepared for vague eventualities.

meter each half hour. The telltale mercury had sunk over two inches in twelve hours. The abnormally low pressure quickly created dense clouds, which enhanced the melancholy darkness of the gale.

For many minutes together the bows of the ship were not visible. Masthead and side lights were obscured by the pelting sleet. The engines thrust the vessel forward like a lance into the vitals of the storm. Wind and wave roared about the vortex with impetuous fury.

At last soon after midnight the battered steamer showed a slight movement. At 1:30 a. m. the change became pronounced. Simultaneously the wind swung round a point to the westward. The captain Ross smiled wearily. His face brightened. He opened his oilskin coat, glanced at the compass and nodded approval. Then he turned to the chief officer. Both men examined the chart in silence.

The chief officer finally took a pencil. He stabbed its point on the paper in the neighborhood of 14 degrees north and 112 degrees east.

"Nothing in the way tonight, sir," he added.

"Nothing whatever. It is a bit of good luck to meet such weather here. We can keep as far south as we like until daybreak, and by that time—How did it look when you came in?"

"A crisis better, I think."

"I have sent for some refreshments. Let us have another look before we tackle them."

The two officers passed out into the hurricane. Instantly the wind endeavored to tear the chart house from off the deck. They looked aloft and ahead. The officer on duty saw them and nodded silent comprehension. It was useless to attempt to speak. The weather was perceptibly clearer.

Then all three peered ahead again. They stood, pressing against the wind, seeking to penetrate the murkiness in front. Suddenly they were galvanised into strenuous activity.

A wild howl came from the lookout forward. The eyes of the three men glared at a huge diamant Chinese junk wallowing helplessly in the trough of the sea dead under the bows. The officer on duty saw them and nodded silent comprehension. It was useless to attempt to speak. The weather was perceptibly clearer.

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There was an awful race by the engines before the engineers could shut off steam. The junk vanished into the wilderness of noise and tumbling seas beyond, and the fine steamer of a few seconds ago, replete with magnificent energy, struggled like a wounded levitation in the grasp of a vengeful foe.

She swung around as if in wrath to pursue the puny assailant which had dealt her this mortal stroke. No longer breathing the storm with stubborn persistence, she now drifted aimlessly before wind and wave. She was merely a larger plaything tossed about by Titanic symbols. The junk was burst asunder by the collision. Her planks and cargo littered the waves, were swept to a decision on to the decks of the Sirdar. Of what avail was strong timber or bolted iron against the spleen of the unchained and furious monster who loudly proclaimed his triumph? The great steamship drifted on through chaos. The typhoon had broken the Sirdar.

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self to a sitting posture, for he was bruised and stiff. With his first movement he became violently ill. He had swallowed much salt water, and it was not until the spasm of sickness had passed that he thought of the girl. By their calm courage they attract the attention of another vessel she would follow the disabled Sirdar and render help when the weather moderated.

When the captain ascertained that no water was being shipped, the damage being wholly external, the passengers were ordered and the passengers admitted to the saloon, a brilliant palace, superbly indifferent to the wreck and rain without.

"You are alive!"

"Captain Ross himself came down and addressed a few comforting words to the quiet men and women who were so glad to hear his voice. He told them exactly what had happened.

"The hours passed in tedious misery after captain Ross had visited the cabin to see how the men and women were. He was eager to get a glimpse of the unknown terrors without from the deck. This was out of the question, but he eagerly to Experience and his wise saws on drifting ships and their prospects anxiously.

Meanwhile in the chart house the captain and chief officer were gravely pondering over an open chart and discussing a fresh risk that loomed ominously before them. The ship was a long way out of her usual course when the accident happened. She was drifting north, they estimated, eleven knots an hour, with wind, sea and current all forcing her in the same direction, drifting into one of the most dangerous places in the known world, the south China sea, with its reefs and rocks and the great island of Borneo stretching right across the path of the cyclone.

Still there was never to be done save to make a few unobtrusive preparations and trust to fate. The attempt to anchor and ride out the gale failed. Suddenly their position was out of the question.

Two, 3, a clock came and went. Another half hour passed, and the dawn and a further clearing of the weather. The barometer was rapidly rising. The center of the cyclone had swept far ahead. There was only left the aftermath of heavy seas and turbulent weather.

number of inanimate human forms lay huddled up amid the relics of the steamer.

This discovery stirred him to action. He turned to survey the land on which he stood, and with his helpless companion. To his great relief he discovered that it was lofty and tree clad. He knew that the ship could not have drifted to Borneo, which still lay far to the south. This must be one of the hundreds of islands which stud the China sea and provide resorts for Han fishermen. Probably it was inhabited, though he thought it strange that some of the islands had put in an appearance. In any event water and food of some sort were assured. But before setting out upon his quest two things demanded attention. The girl must be removed from her present position. It would be too horrible to permit her frail conscious gaze to rest upon those crumpled objects on the beach. Common humanity demanded, too, that he should hastily examine each of the bodies in case life was not wholly extinct.

So he bent over the girl, noting with sudden wonder that, weak as she was, she had managed to refasten part of her bodice.

"You must permit me to carry you a little farther inland," he explained gently.

Without another word he lifted her in his arms, marveling somewhat at the strength which came of necessity, and bore her some little distance until sturdy rock jutted out of the sand offered shelter from the wind and protection from the sea and its revelations.

"I am so cold and tired," murmured Iris. "Is there any water? My throat hurts me."

"I'll press back the tangled hair from her forehead as he might soothe a child.

"Try to lie still for a very few minutes," he said. "You've not long to suffer. I will return immediately."

His own throat and palate were on fire owing to the brine, but he first went back to the edge of the lagoon. There were fourteen bodies in all, three women and eleven men, four of the latter being Lascars. The women were the passengers whom he did not know. One of the men was the surgeon, another the first officer, a third Sir John Tozer. The rest were passengers and members of the crew. They were all dead; some had been peacefully lowered into the sea, but many were smothered by the rocks. Two of the Lascars, bearing signs of dreadful injuries, were lying on a cluster of low rocks overlooking the water. The remainder rested on the sand.

The sailor exhibited no visible emotion while he contemplated the scene. When he was assured that this silent company was beyond mortal help he at once strode away toward the nearest hut, to see if he could not tell how long the search for water might be protracted, and there was pressing need for it.

When he reached the first clump of brushwood he uttered a delighted exclamation. There, growing in prodigal luxuriance, was the lushest patch of rice which large curled up leaf, shed like a teacup, not only holds a list of quantities of manure but mixes it with its own palatable and natural juices.

With his knife he severed two of the leaves and increased to Iris with the rice beverage. She heard him and intimated to raise herself on an elbow. The girl's eyes glistened at the prospect of rice. With a word of question or simile she swallowed the contents of both leaves.

"The rice is fine, my dear," she said. "It tastes like what it is."

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of salt and sand that covered his face. "Why," she went on, with growing excitement, "you are the steward I noticed in the saloon yesterday. How is it that you are now dressed as a sailor?"

He answered readily enough. "There was an accident on board during the gale, madam. I am a fair sailor, but a poor steward, so I applied for a transfer. As the crew was short handed, my officers accepted of me."

"You saved my life," she repeated slowly. It seemed that this obvious fact needed to be indelibly established in her mind. Indeed the girl was overwrought by all that she had gone through. Only by degrees were her thoughts marshaling themselves with lucid coherence. As yet she recalled so many dramatic incidents that they failed to assume due proportion.

But whatever these came memories of Captain Ross, of Sir John and Lady Tozer, of the doctor, her maid, the hundred and one individualities of her pleasant life aboard ship. Could it be that they were all dead? The notion was monstrous. But its ghastly significance was instantly borne in upon her by the plight in which she stood. Her lips quivered; the tears trembled in her eyes.

"Is it really true that all the ship's company except ourselves are lost?" she brokenly demanded.

The sailor's gravely earnest glance fell before hers. "Unhappily there is no room for doubt," he said.

"Are you quite sure?"

"I am sure—of some." Involuntarily she turned seaward.

She understood him. She sank to her knees, covered her face with her hands and broke into a passion of weeping and wailing of infinite pity he stooped and would have touched her shoulder, but he suddenly restrained the impulse. Something had happened to the man. It cost him an effort to be calm, but he succeeded. His mouth tightened, and his expression lost its tenderness.

"Come, come, my dear lady," he exclaimed, and there was a tinge of studied cheerfulness in his voice, "you must not mourn. It is the fortune of shipwreck as well as of war, you know. We are alive and must look after ourselves. Those who have gone are beyond our help."

"But beyond our sympathy?"

"Beyond our sympathy?" she repeated, waiting Iris, uncovering her swimming eyes for a fleeting look at him. Even in the utter desolation of the moment she could not help marveling that this queer man, who spoke like a gentleman and tried to pose as her inferior, who had rescued her with the utmost gallantry, who carried his own food to the point of first supplying her needs, which he was in far worse case himself, should be so utterly indifferent to the fate of others.

"Well, madam?"

"What is your name?" she interrupted imperiously.

"Jenkins, madam, Robert Jenkins."

"My name is Miss Iris Deane. On board ship I was a passenger and you were a steward—that is, until you became a seaman. Here we are equals in misfortune, but in all else you are the leader. I am quite useless. I can only help in matters by your direction, only help in matters by your direction,

"The leaf of the pitcher plant. Nature is not always cruel. In an emergency she will do almost anything. Miss Deane reached out her hand for more rice, but her brain refused to consider that as a reply from an ordinary seaman. The sailor deliberately spilled the contents of a remaining leaf on the sand.

"No, madam," he said, with an odd mixture of defiance and firmness. "No more at present. I must first procure you some food."

She looked up at him in momentary surprise.

"The ship is lost?" she said after a pause.

"Yes, madam."

"Are we the only people saved?"

"I think not, madam. It may be chance, but I am temporarily unhabited, but fishermen from China come to all these places. I have seen no other living beings except ourselves. Nevertheless the islanders may live on the south side."

"It surely cannot be possible that the Sirdar has gone to pieces?"

"It is an upright matter and strength?"

He answered quietly: "It is too true, madam. I suppose you hardly know how quickly a vessel of her size and tonnage can be wrecked."

"How do you know?" she inquired quickly. "Good of vivid recollection was pouring in upon her."

"I—er—well, I happened to be near and was—er—drifted ashore together."

She rose and faced him. "I remember now," she cried hysterically. "You caught me as we were thrown into the corridor. We fell into the sea when the vessel turned over. You have saved my life. Were it not for you I could not possibly have escaped."

She gazed at him more earnestly, seeing that he blushed beneath the crust

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