

STRANGER ABOARD.

A Tale of the Supernatural.

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The Fraserburgh trawler "Rose of Faithlie" nosed her way through the night, at a steady eight knots, towards Mallaig, from the West Coast fishing grounds, with seventy odd crans of prime Loch Fyne herring in her fish pond. It was her last run for the season, after many weeks of hard yet profitable labour, and soon now the boat and her crew would be on their way back to their home port and a well earned rest.

The night was calm and clear, no wind and "easy watter" as the fishermen say, so the ship was making steady progress, the smoke from her stack rising in the cool air, then trailing away astern like a long black ribbon, whilst the quiet of the night was broken only by the steady beat of the engines and the slap of a wave against her bows as the boat gently rose and fell to the lift of the sea.

Up in the "house" amidships Geordie, the skipper, stood at the wheel smoking his pipe in quiet contentment and deep satisfaction at the approaching end of a prosperous voyage.

"Ay," he said to himself, "It has been a gweed trip an' this run will mak a gweed feenish, seventy cran an' a risin' market, wi nae lost gear tae pay for. We'll a' be gled tae be

hame tho for we're a' thinkin' lang tae see oor ain folk, especially young Jimmie, for he wis only three days merriet fan we sailed, an' he'll be rale anxious tae see Bella again. She's a fine lass an' will mak Jimmie a gran' wife an' ---

The skipper's pleasant reflections were rudely interrupted, his pipe dropped from between his chattering teeth, and his face turned white under the mahogany as he gazed awe struck through the wheel-house window.

"Gweed God" he whispered fearfully "What is yon up forrad, stannin', starin' sae earnest like oot aheid, ay' jist starin', starin' wi niver a meeve. Whar did he come frae an' what wid he be wintin'. He's nae ane o' oor lads, na, he's a stranger an' I dinna like it, no I dinna like it ava. It's nae canny an' forebodes nae gweed I sairly doot."

A sudden lurch made Geordie suddenly realise that his hands were no longer on the wheel and the boat was falling away. Grasping the spokes, he quickly brought the trawler back on her course, then opening the wheel-house window, he called out to Ben, the mate.

"Come up an' tak the wheel Ben will ye, till I gang below an' hae a heat, I'm fair stiff we caul".

"Ay, ay", answered Ben, "I'll be wi ye in a meenit", and picking up his pipe and matches came up from below, wondering how the skipper came to be so cold on such a fine night, and

fearing he was sickening for something.

Coming into the wheel-house he looked at the skipper sharply and then said, "Man, Geordie, ye're nae lookin' sae weel, awa doon an' get a cup o' tea an' a heat an' then we'll see what like ye are by an' by. Awa ye go, I'll tak her."

With that he took the wheel and gave a casual glance ahead, then hair on end, he cried,

"Almighty preserve us, wha is that feersome lookin' chiel up in the bows, Geordie, an' what is he daein' aboard oor boat, jist stannin' there glowerin' straucht oot aheid, I sair doot he means nae gweed tae us."

"Sae you see him as weel," said the skipper. "Then I'm nae dreamin', here Ben, gie me the wheel and awa ye gang forrad an' speir what he wints here an' whar he cam frae."

"That I winna Geordie" cried Ben. "I'm nae fear't at ordinar' fouk, bit that chiel's nae o' this warl' or I'm sair cheetit, bit lats cry doon tae Sandy, he's nae a grain nervish at onything."

So the skipper called down tae Sandy to come up and take over until Ben and himself had some tea and a heat as they were both cold.

In a minute up came Sandy and entered the wheel-house, put a match to his pipe and said "Noo I'm ready, awa ye go, bit what wye ye're baith sae caul' beats me, it's like a baker's oven

in here, I maun hae the windae opeh. Ay' that's better. Is she on her coorse Skipper, I thocht we should hae been mair tae the - Hullo, wha is that queer lookin' chiel up forrad an' what's he wantin' here, jist hold on a meenit an' I'll gang an' speir his bigness. Are you comin' Ben?"

"Weel," said Ben, "if ye're nae fear't at him, I'll come wi ye, tho I'm still leery aboot the chiel".

"Ay awa ye go, the twa o' you" says the Skipper. "Baith thegither, ye shou'd be fit for him, if he tries onything."

So down the stair the two went, and made their way forward towards the stranger, but as they were drawing near, the strange figure seemed to melt into the air and disappeared from their sight, "just" as Sandy remarked, "like a puff o' reek fae the galley lum in the win".

Sandy made light of their eerie and mystifying experience, tho he had to admit it was queer, very queer, but Ben and the skipper were deeply concerned and sorely afraid that the weird apparition they'd seen was the advance agent of disaster in some shape or form.

They kept their thoughts to themselves however and Sandy was warned to say nothing to the other members of the crew about the strange occurrence.

Shortly afterwards Mallaig light hove in sight and Sandy went below to rouse out the rest of the crew so that they could

have breakfast over before the boat tied up and discharging commenced. When Sandy came along to where Jimmie slept he found him already up, dressed and sitting quietly on his bunk. "Ay, ay, Jimmie, sae you're up are ye, couldna sleep for thinkin' aboot seein' Bella shortly, I'll wager ye've been seein' her in your dreams ilka nicht for a fyle noo, man Jimmie ye shou'd hae been up abeen hae lang ago and seen what I saw, ye'll niver guess."

"Dae ye think that Sandy", answered Jimmie very quietly. "Mebbe I ken, withoot guessin'".

With that the lad went up on deck, and as the boat was now nearing her berth, he took up his position in the bows, ready to jump ashore and make fast as the skipper eased her towards the quay side.

When the boat was still a foot or two from the side, Jimmie jumped as he'd done dozens of times before, but this time he slipped somehow as he took off, and instead of landing on his feet on the quay, he crashed head on into the wall, fell back into the water between the boat and the harbour wall and sank out of sight.

Jimmie was dead when found, stunned and then drowned, said the doctor, who examined the body.

With sad hearts and lagging steps his shipmates carried Jimmie back on board the trawler and as they were laying him on

his bed, Ben saw a letter lying on his pillow. It was addressed to Bella and as he handed the letter to the skipper, Ben said sadly "We ken noo wha\ the stranger wis, ay' and Jimmie kent as weel".

There were tears in the skipper's eyes and a tremor in his voice as he replied, "Ay Ben we ken noo, but Jimmie kent afore us an' when he said fareweel to Bella, it wis the stranger's han' that heild the pen".

Then very carefully and reverently he placed the letter in his pocket.

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