

The Melancholy Shipwreck of the Gossamer

Tim Brooks Oct 2015

In the Autumn of 1868 the Clipper Ship Gossamer came second in the unofficial race to bring back from China to London the first tea of the season.

Her young and reckless skipper, Captain John Thompson, having made his name, proposed to and married his sweetheart Barbara Kerr.

Within three weeks they were setting out together from London on his next voyage. Barbara was to be dropped off in Plymouth.

A severe westerly gale was blowing up the English Channel. Most ships put into port to shelter, but this was a Clipper Ship with deadlines to meet.

This trip didn't go so well.....

Take notice all, of what may befall
How your life may be held on a thread
A gossamer token
so easily broken
Forever to lie with the dead

With a terrible rending she drove on the rocks
The great seas washed over her deck
Now the Gossamer lay
on the rocks of the bay
Could any be saved from the wreck

My name is John Thompson a Sea Captain bold
Just lately from China returned
and taken to wife
the love of my life
Far better if she had me spurned

Now Barbara Kerr had climbed to the deck
And she clung to her captain so brave
for to swim or to stay
no one could say
and she trembled at every great wave.

Grass not waves shall cover our grave,
Daisies shall mark where we sleep
So briefly together
but our love is forever,
Stranger, do not weep

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For eight long days we faced the gale
Till a homeward beat we'd found
First Start then Prowl
we'll overhaul
Then clear through to Plymouth Sound

Then a monstrous sea tore her from his grasp
John Thompson leapt into the swell
The wind made a cry
he'll save her or die...
Ringers sound your knell

But the rip tide took us perilous close
The danger seen too late
Both anchors dropped
but nothing could stop
The Gossamer's terrible fate

Still tightly wrapt in each other's arms
Tossed ashore by the tempest they lay
and their lifeless bones
to Chiselstone
were gently borne away

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