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**Blow The Man Down A Romance
Of The Coast - 1916**

Holman Day

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BLOW THE MAN DOWN
A ROMANCE OF THE COAST

By Holman Day

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TO MY GOOD FRIEND

Captain John W. Christie

BRITISH MASTER MARINER WHO HAS SUNG ALL THE
SHANTIES AND HAS SAILED ALL THE SEAS

"O, blow the man down, bullies, blow the man down! Way-ay, blow the man down. O, blow the man down in Liverpool town! Give me some time to blow the man down." – Old Shanty of the Atlantic Packet Ships.

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BLOW THE MAN DOWN

I ~ CAPTAIN BOYD MAYO GETS OUT OF SOUNDINGS

When in safety or in doubt, Always keep a safe lookout;
Strive to keep a level head, Mind your lights and mind your
lead. —Pilot-house Ditty.

For days he had been afraid of that incredible madness of his as a man fears a nameless monster. But he was sure of his strength even while admitting his weakness. He was confident that he had the thing securely in leash.

Then all at once it happened!

Without preface of word or look he whirled and faced her, swept her into his arms and kissed her. He did not attempt to absolve himself or mitigate his offense by telling her that he loved her. He was voiceless—he could not control his speech. He did not dare to show such presumption as talk of love must seem to be to her. He knew he must not speak of love; such proffer to her would be lunacy. But this greater presumption, this blind capture of her in his arms—this was something which he had not intended any more than a sane man considers flight to the moon.

He did not understand; he had been himself—then, instantly, in time measured by a finger-snap, he had become this wretch who seemed to be somebody else.

He had ceased, for an insane moment, to be master of all his senses. But he released her as suddenly as he had seized her, and staggered to the door of the chart-room, turning his back on her and groaning in supreme misery.

In that moment of delirium he had insulted his own New England sense of decency and honor.

He was afraid to look back at her. With an agony of apprehension he dreaded the sound of her voice. He knew well enough that she was striving to get command of herself, to recover from her utter amazement. He waited. The outrage must have incensed her beyond measure; the silence was prolonged.

In the yacht's saloon below a violin sang its very soul out upon the summer night, weaving its plaint into the soft, *adagio* rippling of a piano's chords.

He searched his soul. The music, that distant, mellow phrasing of the call of love, the music had unstrung him. While he paced the bridge before her coming that music had been melting the ice of his natural reserve. But he did not pardon himself because he had acted the fool.

He stared at the night framed in the door of the chart-house. Little waves were racing toward him, straight from the moon, on the sea-line, like a flood of new silver pouring from the open door of plenty!

But the appealing beauty of that night could not excuse the unconscionable insult he had just offered her. He knew it, and shivered.

She had come and leaned close to him over the outspread chart, her breath on his cheek—so close to him that a roving tress of her hair flicked him. But because a sudden fire had leaped from the touch to his brain was no reason for the act by which he had just damned himself as a presumptuous brute.

For he, Boyd Mayo, captain of her father's yacht, a hireling, had just paid the same insulting courtship to Alma Marston that a sailor would proffer to an ogling girl on the street.

"I'll jump overboard," he stammered at last. "I'll take myself out of your sight forever."

The ominous silence persisted.

"I don't ask you to forgive me. It is not a thing which can be forgiven. Tell them I was insane—and jumped overboard. That will be the truth. I am a lunatic."

He lurched through the door. In that desperate moment, in the whirl of his emotions, there seemed to be no other way out of his horrible predicament. He had grown to love the girl with all the consuming passion of his soul, realizing fully his blind folly at the same time. He had built no false hopes. As to speaking of that love—even betraying it by a glance—he had sheathed himself in the armor of reserved constraint; he had been sure that he sooner would have gone down on his hands and knees and bayed that silver moon from the deck of the yacht *Olenia* than do what he had just done.

"Captain Mayo! Wait!"

He waited without turning to look at her. Her voice was not steady, but he could not determine from the tone what her emotions were.

"Come back here!"

She was obliged to repeat the command with sharper authority before he obeyed. He lowered his eyes and stood before her, a voiceless suppliant.

"Why did you do that?" she asked. It was not the contemptuous demand which he had been fearing. Her voice was so low that it was almost a whisper.

"I don't know," he confessed.

The violin sang on; the moon shone in at the door; two strokes, like golden globules of sound, from the ship's bell signaled nine o'clock. Only the rhythm of the engines, as soothing as a cat's purring, and the slow roll of the yacht and the murmuring of the parted waves revealed that the *Olenia* was on her way through the night.

"I don't know," he repeated. "It doesn't excuse me to say that I could not help it."

And he understood women so little that he did not realize that he was making the ages-old plea which has softened feminine rancor ever since the Sabine women were borne away in their captors' arms and forgave their captors.

She stared at him, making once more a maiden's swift appraisal of this young man who had offered himself so humbly as a sacrifice.

His brown hands were crossed in front of him and clutched convulsively his white cap. The cap and the linen above the collar of his uniform coat brought out to the full the hue of his manly tan. The red flush of his shocked contrition touched his cheeks, and, all in all, whatever the daughter of Julius Marston, Wall Street priest of high finance, may have thought of his effrontery, the melting look she gave him from under lowered eyelids indicated her appreciation of his outward excellencies.

"I suppose you are thoroughly and properly ashamed of what you have done!"

"I am ashamed—so ashamed that I shall never dare to raise my eyes to you again. I will do what I promised. I will jump overboard."

"Captain Mayo, look at me!"

When he obeyed, with the demeanor of a whipped hound, his perturbation would not allow him to show as much appreciation of her as she had displayed in the secret study of him, which she now promptly concealed. He surveyed her wistfully, with fear. And a maiden, after she has understood that she has obtained mastery over brawn and soul, does not care to be looked at as if she were Medusa.

She stole a side-glance at her face in one of the mirrors, and then tucked into place a vagrant lock of hair with a shapely finger, thereby suggesting, had there been a cynical observer present, that Miss Alma Marston never allowed any situation, no matter how crucial, to take her attention wholly from herself.

There was no mistaking it—had that cynical observer been there, he would have noted that she pouted slightly when Mayo declared his unutterable shame.

"You will never get over that shame, will you?"

And Captain Mayo, feverishly anxious to show that he understood the enormity of his offense, and desiring to offer pledge for the future, declared that his shame would never lessen.

Her dark eyes sparkled; whether there was mischief mingled with resentment, or whether the resentment quite supplanted all other

emotions, might have been a difficult problem for the cynic. But when she tilted her chin and stared the offender full in the eyes, propping her plump little hands in the side-pockets of her white reefer, Captain Mayo, like a man hit by a cudgel, was struck with the sudden and bewildering knowledge that he did not know much about women, for she asked, with a quizzical drawl, "Just what is there about me, dear captain, to inspire that everlasting regret which seems to be troubling you so much?"

Even then he did not grasp the full import of her provocative question. "It isn't you. I'm the one who is wholly to blame," he stammered. "I have dared to—But no matter. I know my place. I'll show you I know it."

"You *dared* to—What have you dared to do—besides what you just did?"

"I cannot tell you, Miss Marston. I don't propose to insult you again."

"I command you to tell me, Captain Mayo."

He could not comprehend her mood in the least and his demeanor showed it. Her command had a funny little ripple in it—as of laughter suppressed. There were queer quirks at the corners of her full, red lips.

"Now straighten up like your real self! I don't like to see you standing that way. You know I like to have all the folks on the yachts look at our captain when we go into a harbor! You didn't know it? Well, I do. Now what have you dared to do?"

He did straighten then. "I have dared to fall in love with you, Miss Marston. So have a lot of other fools, I suppose. But I am the worst of all. I am only a sailor. How I lost control of myself I don't know!"

"Not even now?" Still that unexplainable softness in her voice, that strange expression on her face. Being a sailor, he looked on this calm as being ominous presage of a storm.

"I am willing to have you report me to your father, Miss Marston. I will take my punishment. I will never offend you again."

"You can control yourself after this, can you?"

"Yes, Miss Marston, absolutely."

She hesitated; she smiled. She lowered her eyelids again and surveyed him with the satisfied tolerance a pretty woman can so easily extend when unconquerable ardor has prompted to rashness.

"Oh, you funny, prim Yankee!" she murmured. "You don't understand even now just why you did it!"

His face revealed that he did not in the least understand.

"Come here," she invited.

He went three steps across the narrow cabin and stood in an attitude of respectful obedience before her.

"What now, sir?" It was query even more provocative—a smile went with it.

"I apologize. I have learned my lesson."

"You need to learn a lot—you are very ignorant," she replied, with considerable tartness.

"Yes," he agreed, humbly.

What happened then was so wholly outside his reckoning that the preceding events of the evening retired tamely into the background. It had been conceivable that rush of passion might drive him to break all the rules of conduct his New England conscience had set over him; but what Alma Marston did overwhelmed him with such stupefaction that he stood there as rigid and motionless as a belying-pin in a rack. She put up her arms, pressed her two hands on his shoulders, stood on tiptoe, and kissed him on his lips.

"There, foolish old Yankee," she said, softly, her mouth close to his; "since you are so ashamed I give you back your kiss—and all is made right between us, because we are just where we started a little while ago."

His amazement had so benumbed him that even after that surrender he stood there, close to her, his countenance blank, his arms dangling at his side.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" she asked, petulantly.

"I don't know! I—I—I don't seem to understand."

"I'm going to be honest with you. You are so honest you will understand me, then," she told him. It seemed to him that he must be mistaken, but he certainly felt her arms were slipping up his shoulders and had met behind his neck. "I saw it in your eyes long ago. A woman always knows. I wanted you to do what you did to-night. I knew I would be obliged to tempt you. I came up here while the moon and the music would help me. I did it all on purpose—I stood close to you—for I knew you were just my slow old Yankee who would never come out of his shell till I poked. There! I have confessed!"

His mad joy did not allow him to see anything of the coquette in that confession. It all seemed to be consecrated by the love he felt for her—a love which was so honest that he perceived no boldness in the attitude of this girl who had come so far to meet him. He took her into his arms again, and she returned his kisses.

"Tell me again, Boyd, that you love me," she coaxed.

"And yet I have no right to love you. You are—"

"Hush! Hush! There goes your Yankee caution talking! I want love, for I am a girl. Love hasn't anything to do with what you are or what I am. Not now! We will love each other—and wait! You are my big boy! Aren't you?"

He was glad to comply with her plea to put sensible talk from them just then. There was nothing sensible he could say. He was holding Julius Marston's daughter in his arms, and she was telling him that she loved him. The world was suddenly upside down and he was surrendering himself to the mad present.

In the yacht's saloon below a woman began to sing: "Love comes like a summer sigh, Softly o'er us stealing. Love comes and we wonder why To its shrine we're kneeling. Love comes as the days go by—"

"That's it," the girl murmured, eagerly. "We don't know anything at all about why we love. Folks who marry for money make believe love—I have watched them—I know. I love you. You're my big boy. That's all. That's enough."

He accepted this comforting doctrine unquestioningly. Her serene acceptance of the situation, without one wrinkle in her placid brow to indicate that any future problems annoyed her, did not arouse his wonderment or cause him to question the depths of her emotions; it only added one more element to the unreality of the entire affair.

Moon and music, silver sea and glorious night, and a maid who had been, in his secret thoughts, his dream of the unattainable!

"Will you wait for me – wait till I can make something of myself?" he demanded.

"You are yourself – right now – that's enough!"

"But the future. I must –"

"Love me – love me now – that's all we need to ask. The future will take care of itself when the time comes! Haven't you read about the great loves? How they just forgot the whole petty world? What has love to do with business and money and bargains? Love in its place – business in its place! And our love will be our secret until –"

He pardoned her indefiniteness, for when she paused and hesitated she pressed her lips to his, and that assurance was enough for him.

"Yes – oh yes – Miss Alma!" called a man's voice in the singsong of eager summons.

"It's Arthur," she said, with snap of impatience in her voice. "Why won't people let me alone?"

He released her, and she stood at arm's-length, her hands against his breast. "I have thought – It seemed to me," he stammered, "that he – Forgive me, but I have loved you so! I couldn't bear to think – think that he –"

"You thought I cared for him!" she chided. "That's only the man my father has picked out for me! Why, I wouldn't even allow my father to select a yachting-cap for me, much less a husband. I'll tell him so when the time comes!"

Mayo's brows wrinkled in spite of himself. The morrow seemed to play small part in the calculations of this maid.

"Money—that's all there is to Arthur Beveridge. My father has enough money for all of us. And if he is stingy with us—oh, it's easy enough to earn money, isn't it? All men can earn money."

Captain Mayo, sailor, was not sure of his course in financial waters and did not reply.

"Miss Alma! I say! Oh, where are you?"

"Even that silly, little, dried-up man," she jeered, with a duck of her head in the direction of the drawling voice, "goes down to Wall Street and makes thousands and thousands of dollars whenever he feels like it. And you could put him in your reefer pocket. They will all be afraid of you when you go down to Wall Street to make lots of money for us two. You shall see! Kiss me! Kiss me once! Kiss me quick! Here he comes!"

He obeyed, released her, and when Beveridge shoved his wizened face in at the door they were bending over the chart.

"Oh, I say, we have missed you. They are asking for you."

She did not turn to look at him. "I have something else on my mind, Arthur, besides lolling below listening to Wally Dalton fiddle love-tunes. And this passage, here, Captain Mayo! What is it?" Her finger strayed idly across a few hundred miles of mapped Atlantic Ocean.

"It's Honeymoon Channel," replied the navigator, demurely. His new ecstasy made him bold enough to jest.

"Oh, so we are learning to be a captain, Miss Alma?" inquired Beveridge with a wry smile.

"It would be better if more yacht-owners knew how to manage their own craft," she informed him, with spirit.

"Yes, it might keep the understrappers in line," agreed the man at the door.. "I apply for the position of first mate after you qualify, Captain Alma."

"And this, you say, is, Captain Mayo?" she queried, without troubling herself to reply. Her tone was crisply matter of fact.

Beveridge blinked at her and showed the disconcerted uneasiness of a man who has intruded in business hours.

Captain Mayo, watching the white finger rapturously, noted that it was sweeping from the Arctic Circle to the Tropic Zone. "That's Love Harbor, reached through the thoroughfare of Hope," he answered, respectfully.

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Beveridge; "the sailors who laid out that course must have been romantic."

"Sailors have souls to correspond with their horizon, Arthur. Would you prefer such names as Cash Cove and Money-grub Channel?"

Mr. Beveridge cocked an eyebrow and stared at her eloquent back; also, he cast a glance of no great favor on the stalwart young captain of the *Olenia*. It certainly did not occur to Mr. Beveridge that two young folks in love were making sport of him. That Julius Marston's daughter would descend to a yacht captain would have appeared as incredible an enormity as an affair with the butler. But there was something about this intimate companionship of the chart-room which Mr. Beveridge did not relish. Instinct rather than any sane reason told him that he was not wanted.

"I'm sorry to break in on your studies, Miss Marston," he said, a bit stiffly. "But I have been sent by your father to call you to the cabin." Mr. Beveridge's air, his tone of protest, conveyed rather pointed hint that her responsibilities as a hostess were fully as important as her studies as a navigator.

"I must go," she whispered.

Relief was mingled with Captain Mayo's regret. He had feared that this impetuous young woman might rebel against the summons, even though the word came from her father. And her persistent stay in his chart-room, even on the pretext of a fervid interest in the mysteries of navigation, might produce complications. This wonderful new joy in his life was too precious to be marred by complications.

She trailed her fingers along his hand when she turned from the chart-table, and then pinched him in farewell salute.

"Good night, Captain Mayo. I'll take another lesson to-morrow."

"I am at your service," he told her.

Their voices betrayed nothing, but Beveridge's keen eyes—the eyes which had studied faces in the greatest game of all when fortunes were at stake—noted the look they exchanged. It was long-drawn, as expressive as a lingering kiss.

Mr. Beveridge, sanctioned in his courtship by Julius Marston, was not especially worried by any inferences from that soft glance. He could not blame even a coal-heaver who might stare tenderly at Miss Alma Marston, for she was especially pleasing to the eye, and he enjoyed looking at her himself. He was enough of a philosopher to be willing to have other folks enjoy themselves and thereby give their approbation to his choice. He excused Captain Mayo. As to Miss Marston, he viewed her frivolity as he did that of the other girls whom he knew; they all had too much time on their hands.

"Give the poor devils a chance, Alma. Don't tip 'em upside down," he advised, testily, when she followed him down the ladder. He stood at the foot and offered his hand, but she leaped down the last two steps and did not accept his assistance. "Now, you have twisted that skipper of ours until he doesn't know north from south."

"I do not care much for your emphasis on the 'now,'" she declared, indignantly. "You seem to intimate that I am going about the world trying to beguile every man I see."

"That seems to be the popular indoor and outdoor sport for girls in these days," he returned with good humor. "Just a moment ago you were raising the very devil with that fellow up there with your eyes. Of course, practice makes perfect. But you're a good, kind girl in your heart. Don't make 'em miserable."

Mr. Beveridge's commiseration would have been wasted on Captain Boyd Mayo that evening. The captain snapped off the light in the chart-room as soon as they had departed, and there in the gloom he took his happiness to his heart, even as he had taken her delicious self to his breast. He put up his hands and pressed his face into the palms. He inhaled the delicate, subtle fragrance—a mere suggestion of perfume—the sweet ghost of her personality, which she had left behind. Her touch still thrilled him, and the warmth of her last kiss was on his lips.

Then he went out and climbed the ladder to the bridge. A peep over the shoulder of the man at the wheel into the mellow glow under the hood of the binnacle, showed him that the *Olenia* was on her course.

"It's a beautiful night, Mr. McGaw," he said to the mate, a stumpy little man with bowed legs, who was pacing to and fro, measuring strides with the regularity of a pendulum.

"It is that, sir!"

Mr. McGaw, before he answered, plainly had difficulty with something which bulged in his cheek. He appeared, also, to be considerably surprised by the captain's air of vivacious gaiety. His superior had been moping around the ship for many days with melancholy spelled in every line of his face.

"Yes, it's the most beautiful and perfect night I ever saw, Mr. McGaw." There was triumph in the captain's buoyant tones.

"Must be allowed to be what they call a starry night for a ramble," admitted the mate, trying to find speech to fit the occasion.

"I will take the rest of this watch and the middle watch, Mr. McGaw," offered the captain. "I want to stay up to-night. I can't go to sleep."

The offer meant that Captain Mayo proposed to stay on duty until four o'clock in the morning.

Mate McGaw fiddled a gnarled finger under his nose and tried to find some words of protest. But Captain Mayo added a crisp command.

"Go below, Mr. McGaw, and take it easy. You can make it up to me some time when there is no moon!" He laughed.

When all the cabin lights were out and he realized that she must be asleep, he walked the bridge, exulting because her safety was in his hands, but supremely exultant because she loved him and had told him so.

Obedience had been in the line of his training.

She had commanded him to live and love in the present, allowing the future to take care of itself, and it afforded him a sense of sweet