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BY CAPT. FRANK H. SHAW.

## CHAPTER XXI.

Concerning Introspection And One Kind of Courage.

(Continued)

The shrinking, shivering Latins hung back when urged to go aloft up the rattling, reeling snrouds. Leigh and Steadman, cool and resourceful—for the second mate was a thorough sailor, whatever his failings—did their

best with word and fist to bring courage into cowardly hearts. One by one they dragged the trembling poltroons from a dozen hiding-places and sent them aloft, following at last themselves, and the shrill clamourings of the fearful crew were speedily dominated by the clear, booming voices of the officers. Aileen had come on deck at the first signs of danger—she lived for the excitement of a storm. She felt a strange thrill pass through her

as she recognised Leigh's voice, unshaken, full of confidence and authority. What if she had judged him hard ly?

Things were in a pretty pass aloft on the main topgallant yard, however. The weather spilling-line—the rope which spills a clewed-up sail of wind—had carried away at the block, and nothing now held the vast stretch of canvas in orderly quietude. Instead, it was belled out above the yard, was flung backwards, resisting all attempts on the part of the cowering sailors to pass it that an attack might be made on the sail from the yard-arm. Leigh exhausted his powers of persuasion to no effect. Had Long Jake been there it might have been that the sailor would have shown himself capable, but

the "blowwind" was taking his new leisure to the full, and had not turned out the work. It was a mad, inferno-like scene up there, a hundred feet above the swaying, wave-swept deck. The sailors were clustered in at the bunt of the yard, patting the icy, iron-hard canvas with shivering fingers, one urging the other to essay the perilous outward journey past that thunderous, deadly bulge of sail-cloth, that seemed to volley madly as it determined to bring death to some shivering soul.

"Stand back there, you loafers!" thundered Leigh; and, passing the quivering foreigners on the foot-rope, he sped out towards the danger spot. The gale was roaring gleefully now, and he could not claw out beyond the vast mountain of sodden cloth. He tried again and again, tried to crawl along the foot-rope and so win a passage; but it was in vain. He perched himself on the swinging rope, and his heart was very light. He knew no fear, though below him was a howling void, pregnant with awful death. One false step, one miscalculation in a handgrip, and he would be precipitated down and down, to fall helplessly to the deck or overside into the raging, boiling misery that was the sea.

"Stand clear, you!" he snapped, springing to his feet and tearing in to the mast with long strides. An idea had come to him. Unless something was done soon the sail must inevitably be lost. That constant battering and shaking could have but one effect if allowed to continue longer. And he was an officer who prided himself on his handiness in times of stress.

It was the work of a moment only to shin aloft up the rigging to the topgallant masthead, where the wire lift—the rope that bears the weight of the yard when the halliards are let go—was fixed. The lift reached down and vanished into the darkness: it shook menacingly as he laid one hand on its wet roundness. But far below that lift was made fast to the topgallant yard outside the bulge of the sail, and a resolute man might manage to clamber to the desired haven, and then work slowly inwards, conquering the sail inch by inch, until the chattering poltroons in at the mast could do their appointed work.

Leigh took just sufficient time to wonder whether Aileen would repent her harsh criticism, supposing he slipped from his holding, and then was off on his perilous venture. It was not the sort of thing the average brave man would care to do on a calm night.

To-night, with the thunder of the partially chained canvas shaking the entire mast, with the lurching heave of the battling ship to add confusion upon confusion, with a thin rain rendering the wire as slippery as glass, with tag-ends of skin-piercing wire to add to the pain and misery of it all, it

was like a descent into Hades itself.

But Leigh went on. Both hands gripped the elusive wire, one knee was crooked about the thing; his oil-skin coat was blown over his head, blinding him, and he felt blood trickling down his lacerated palms. Once, and that was when the helmsman let the ship fly up into the wind, the lift shook madly, and almost flung him off; but he clung on there with all his strength, gripping with his teeth, even, and so went down. He was not afraid of death. Nay, he welcomed a bout with the destroyer. It was mad exhilaration, a sheer delight, to wrestle with death and win a gallant victory.

His foot touched the yard-arm, and he was down astride it, clawing like a madman at the resisting sail. He could never have told how he forced his way inwards, but he did it somehow. His work was only half done when he felt his head swim, and he realised that the frightful ef-

forts were taking their toll of his strength; but he summoned up his energies sufficiently to send his compelling voice rattling into the sailors, and they, responding as a frightened horse to a cutting lash, crept out frightenedly, and managed to reduce the chaotic canvas to order.

Dripping with perspiration, in spite of the chill of the night, Leigh went down on deck, ploughed his way through seething water to the poop, and touched his cap to a bulky figure standing there. In the darkness he did not see another and slimmer form behind Curzon.

"Main topgallant sail's in, sir," he said carelessly.

"So I see. You seem to have had a bit of a tussle, Mr. Leigh. The mate was down half an hour ago." There was reproof in his voice, Leigh thought.

"Sorry, sir. The spilling-line had carried away, and the sail was over the yard. Men couldn't get past, sir."

"Ah, I see. How did you manage?"

"Shinned down the lift, sir." He said it as one might say, "I stooped and picked a handkerchief from a Turkey carpet." And Captain Curzon laughed. He knew what it was to perform that miracle of courage, and the calm ring of Leigh's voice told him as much as he wished to know.

"That's a good man," he said to Aileen as Leigh turned and went to the compass. "Would you like to shun down a lift, my girl?"

Aileen had heard Leigh's reply, and had softened for a moment. Then she reflected harshly that this was but a scenic display, and very differ-

ent from the cool courage required to face an angry giant. She said nothing, but it may be that had Leigh followed up his advantage he would have managed to reinstate himself in the girl's critical sight.

Leigh, however, was otherwise employed—teaching a totally inadequate helmsman how to treat the ship that she might behave more kindly, as the onrushing processions of foam-capped rollers flung themselves recklessly against the speeding fabric. And so Aileen, in spite of the glad abandon that was born of the gale, hardened her heart anew and vowed that her thoughts of the second mate should never know a moment's softening.

(To be continued.)

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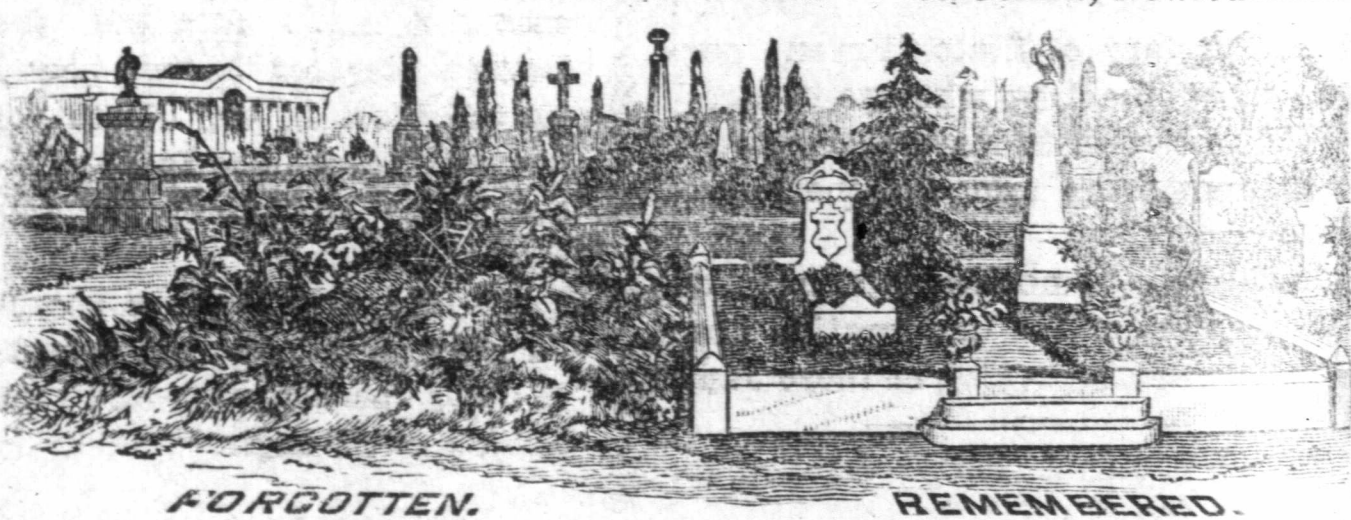
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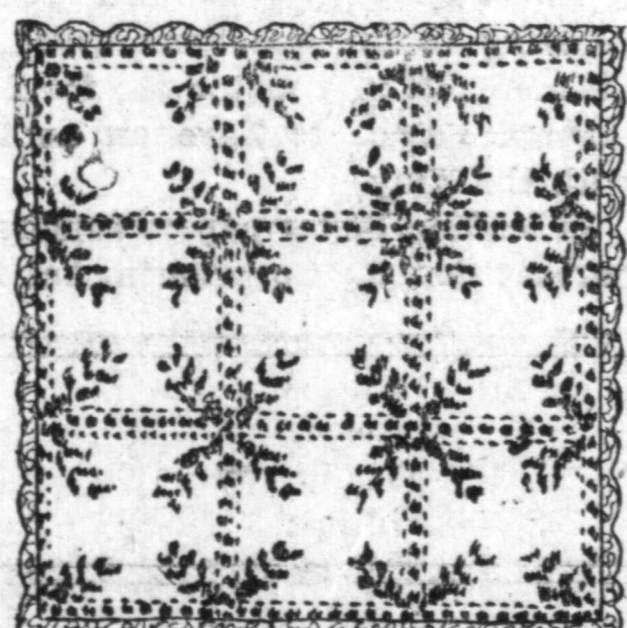
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