

## A DAUGHTER OF THE STORM!

BY CAPT. FRANK H. SHAW.

### CHAPTER XXIX.

#### The Full Force Of The Storm.

For the first time since the mate had stumbled and chill and awful fear settled coldly about Leigh's soul. In the swift rush of events he had forgotten Aileen. Quickly his brain seemed supernaturally gifted—he reckoned up the chances. He was the only man left to stand between Aileen and a fate he dared not contemplate. Bray remained, he believed, but of what use was he? He was a mere lad, short and squat, fairly strong, but a boy. No; this night was to be his own affair, from one end to the other. By some means he must hold back that ravening advance, must stem the tide of murder and save Aileen. What matter if he fell dying at the last—what matter that his own blood poured like water on the deck? Aileen's honour must be saved.

He swung his iron batten and waited. Oh, for the friendly hiss of revolver but, for the spurring crack of powder-speeding bullet! But it was not to be. See, they were coming on, a yelling horde, over-zealous ones treading on the heels of laggards, who seemed hesitant and all afraid. Up flashed the batten.

"What do you want? Get back!"

"You'll find out soon enough, Mister Blasted Second Mate. Down with him, boys, and get the girl!"

Ah, it was a good blow. Straight down it shored, but the darkness rendered sure aim uncertain. It missed the bullet head of Stubbs, but crushed in the skull of a Spanish sailor like an eggshell.

"Get back!" The smitten man rolled down amongst those who clamoured up the ladder, and the mutineers spurned his body aside as veriest mud.

"Get round, two of you, up the other ladder. Pull him down from behind." Stubbs' voice rang hoarsely now. Leigh heard that command and gazed about him with despair in his soul.

"Bray!" he shouted in a great voice. Bray! The door of the half-deck opened swiftly, and the apprentice was out on deck before a man might count three.

"Here, sir."

"Hold the port ladder. Look alive!" Before the last word was spoken Leigh had cut down another dim-sheen head, had heard the answering

crunch and the gasp of a dying man. Bray was alert to obey. He ran leaping from the half-deck door to the rail, and snatched out a weighty belaying-pin. Long Jake intercepted him; Bray gathered himself together and hove the great pin high with both hands. But just at that moment the ship lurched drunkenly. Bray's foot slipped on the water-smoothed planking, he made an effort to save himself, fell forward, the pin striking

Jake sharply on the shoulder, and then, with a choking gasp, the lad rolled into the scuppers. But he was up again, full of fight still, though his life-blood was pumping from the knife thrust in his chest. He was up—leaning against the bulwarks, strangely, very weak; but he must get to that ladder. With a choking roar he went in to the thick of it, smote one man on the back of the head so that he dropped, ducked as the second mate aimed a blow with a hatch-batten at his head, ran in and seized him by the legs, dragged him down with a thud, and, rising above him drove the knuckles of one hand into the black throat beneath. Once he brought down the belaying-pin with stunning force, then again—but he was weak-

ening fast. The man below—a Portuguese—stabbed upwards once and again, and Bray lay still.

In a swift rush of thought Leigh realised that his one strategic point now was the companionway. It was impossible for one man to keep that horde at bay at the break of the poop, for there were two approaches, one of which must remain undefended. He smote swingingly into the upward-thronging crowd; then, as they recoiled, he darted back.

The sailors said he had flown from their attack, and hesitated for one moment to count their damages. They were severe enough, considering what had been opposed to them. Two men dead, their heads crushed beyond recognition; one badly hurt, where the

bar had smashed his arm; another spitting blood and teeth where Leigh had got in a shrewd left-hander from the shoulder; Long Jake, stiff and sore, cursing hard, and brandishing a blood-wet knife.

"He's gone to hide," roared Jake. "I knew he would. On an' gif der gal!"

"There's something happening," said Aileen, with fast-beating heart. "I thought I heard Mr. Steadman's voice. Hark, dad—what's that?" Once before in his life had Captain Carver heard the awful sound of the voices of men who had tasted blood. It is impossible to mistake it, once heard, and he glanced at his daughter. Then he made a strong effort to rise.

"Father! What is it?"

"Quick, girl—that drawer there. The two revolvers. Give me the old one—take the new one on deck to Steadman. There's trouble afoot to-night. God help us all! And I on my back like a dog!"

Aileen found the pistols quickly—she seemed keyed up to a pitch when thought and action were simultaneous. A box of cartridges lay in the drawer; she charged both revolvers with expert hands.

"Come back here as soon as you've handed that pistol over," said her father. "Your place is beside me, girl."

Aileen nodded, white-lipped, then raced out of the room as a bride going to her bridegroom. All that tense strain had gone—that uncertainty of

soul. Here was danger close at hand—horrible danger, if those choking, crunching sounds from overhead meant aught at all. And the gale was rising, too. She felt the spirit of the storm surging in her blood; this child of storm was tasting the salt spray of her native element on her lips. It was grand and altogether glorious, she gasped as she flew through the saloon and halted for one breathless moment at the foot of the companionway.

What was that? The tread of feet on deck, the thud of one man's foot close at hand. And a hoarse, straggling, a chorus of bitter cursing, many tongues raised in vicious anger—a polyglot of tongues, but the burden of them all was murder. She hesitated no longer now. She flashed up the lead-covered, slippery steps of the companionway as if they were level ground, and reached the door of the chart-room—just as Leigh flung himself before it and stood on guard.

"Who's that?" she cried, and the pistol hammer clicked.

"I—Leigh. Get back, girl, get back! They're coming on—they've killed Steadman, the devils!"

Aileen reeled against the bulkhead, her hand fallen limply to her side. Steadman dead! Old Steady, the man who had nursed her as a child and worshipped her as a woman! And that brave, clean life had gone out within the last ten minutes. It was a bare ten minutes since she had been talking to him on the poop, and now—she was dead.

"Get down, girl," rasped Leigh again, and Aileen, uncovered her eyes, saw his right arm swing upward dumbly. It was difficult to distinguish forms and happenings, but she heard the scrape and rush of many feet, saw the strong arm fall once to the accompaniment of a bitten-off curse, and then—something flashed past her in the gloom, a wiry, short figure, brandishing some unwieldy club.

"Look out!" she cried, hardly knowing what she did, but it was too late. Sebastian, the helmsman, had been watching his chance for the postponed blow. Now his time had come, he said. He sprang from the wheel as Leigh turned to starboard to meet the first rush of the mutineers, lifted by belaying-pin, ran in behind the second mate, and aimed a terrific blow at his unprotected head. But once again the darkness of the night foiled the murderous hand. The pin missed the bared crown of the officer's head, but struck him a glancing blow behind the ear.

(To be continued.)

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