

A DAUGHTER OF THE STORM!

BY CAPT. FRANK H. SHAW.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Aileen Gains Clearer Sight.

(Continued)

But beyond that her thoughts were chaotic, uncertain, bewildered. Still, she did not for one moment neglect the necessary details in preparation for the welcoming of the saved. It was she who urged the shivering steward to hasten forward with blanket after blanket, it was she who browbeat the cook until he had managed to kindle a blazing fire in the dripping stove, it was she who personally supervised the brewing of great cauldrons of hot coffee, and who arranged a hundred contrivances for the comfort of the men Leigh had saved.

And as the men were drawn aboard one by one, to be hurried forward to the warmth and light of the galley, to be refreshed with copious draughts of steaming coffee, to be wrapped in hot blankets and then carried to the driest bunks of the forecastle that room

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might be made for others and yet others, it was Aileen who smiled a welcome upon them which, had they been full of understanding, should have done more good than both coffee and blankets combined. But as Curzon continued to tipple, and as the rope was hauled back to take the fourteenth survivor, Aileen drew near to the rail and watched that submerged figure plough the water, with a strange foreboding at her heart. Why, she could not tell. Precious lives had been saved, and gladness should have reigned supreme, but here was the horrible fact: she felt in her heart that some evil was impending over the stout old Zoroaster.

She understood when the face of the fourteenth came over the rail. He was blue and dripping, his eyes were half closed, he was altogether forlorn, but Aileen knew him at a glance, and said he was Stubbs, the late second mate of the Zoroaster, the man who had attempted brutally to insult her in the past.

"Carry him forward," said Curzon gruffly. "The man's face seems familiar to me—expect I've met him abroad. Now pay out the line again; we've got 'em all but Leigh."

Aileen said nothing—why should she mar the pleasure of that good work? But she waded with bated breath until the last man came dragging through the spume, and then, Leigh's exhausted form was drawn aboard, when, gathering up his falling remnants of strength, the second mate said: "All saved, sir." Aileen sprang forward, on her lips her rippling smile, her hands out-thrown in the old impulsive gesture of camaraderie, and "Forgive me!" she cried, "forgive me!"

"There's nothing to forgive," said Leigh faintly, and fell his length on the dripping deck. In the foaming

spume astern the Madeleine went down speedily.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Signs That Herald A Coming Storm.

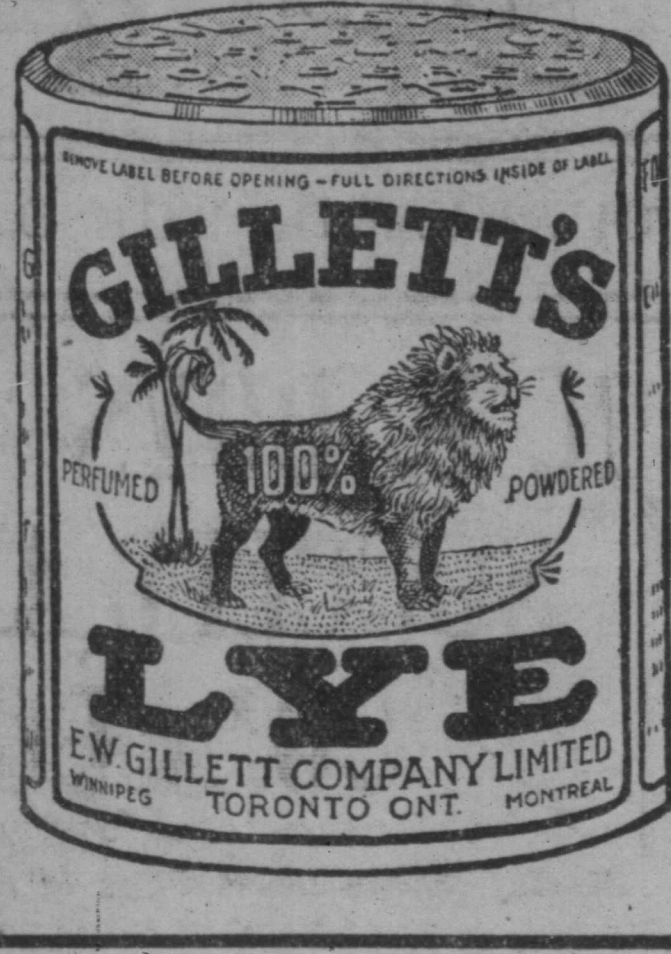
And now the sun shone once more in Leigh's life. Aileen repentant was more charming than Aileen had ever been before. She allowed the young hero to bask in the bright light of her approval; she no longer shunned him, nay, rather she received him back to his old position of comrade and well-tried friend. At times, when Leigh's eyes fell on her musmgly, the old rich flush crept to her cheek and forehead beneath the tan of her outdoor life, and strange flutterings troubled her heart-strings, but still she did not know. The virginity of her had never allowed the thought of companionship with one of the other sex—no closer association, that is, than ordinary boyish friendship—but vaguely, as a child's awakening mind might grasp the realities of the world, Aileen felt that some new element was striving within her, an element that was more pain than pleasure, and yet that was almost poignantly sweet.

Leigh discoursed of many things, but never did he mention the grim sight he had witnessed in the Madeleine's cabin. He had spoken of it to Curzon and Steadman, and these two hearts of oak, after surveying the rescued crew, had formed their own conclusions. But when they summoned Stubbs aft—Stubbs who swore his name was Morgan, and that he was of Irish blood—the man stoutly denied any suggestions of crime.

"Two passengers we carried," he said boldly, his eyes roving the poop as if in search of Aileen. "They quarrelled the night of the gale, and stabbed each other. That's all I know about it. We were too busy after the masts went and the hatches got stove to pay much attention to them; and then the skipper and mate went overboard, and that's all there is about it."

They were fain to be content with

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this explanation, though Curzon thought hard over many things. But chiefly, now that the gale was blown out and the Zoroaster was thrumming gaily to the thrum of the fresh west wind astern, he thought about the strange numbness that occasionally oppressed his legs, and the woeeful pain to his back. He could give it no name, and the old medical work that had served him in good stead when his daughter was born gave him no clue to the real state of affairs. How was he to know that his spinal cord was pressed upon by a displaced vertebra? But so it was, and within a week of the rescue Curzon fell as he was pacing the deck, and cried feebly for his daughter. They carried him below, and made tentative tests. But before another day was gone both Leigh and Steadman knew that paralysis had seized upon the Zoroaster's captain, and that he was doomed to lie there in his cabin a helpless log until death came to bring him release.

heart would have broken in a great despair. So they lied, and still lied, and whilst lying held sway in the cabin, sedition and mutiny were breeding fast in the forecastle, now repaired and rendered watertight.

"I never hope to see a choicer lot of backguards in one ship again than we're carrying now," growled old Steadman to Leigh, as they stumped the deck together. "That new fellow, Morgan as he calls himself is most amazingly like a devil of a brute we had here as second mate last voyage. He's a choicer scoundrel, and as for the rest of them, they're about on a par with him. Still, common gratitude ought to keep them in order till we reach Sydney. After all, you saved the lives of every one of them. But—I'll be glad when we get rid of them, Leigh."

Leigh concurred heartedly. The crew of the Zoroaster had been bad to drive before this, but with the advent of the strangers they were infinitely worse. They sulked and growled at the most ordinary command, and more than once Leigh had seen a swarthy-haired hand fly to a ready knife-halt when he had insisted on obedience to some perfectly lawful command. There was a vague unrest permeating the entire ship from bow to stern, and the enforced absence of the captain, together with that of Aileen, who devoted almost all her time to her father's tendance, in no wise allayed the feeling.

"I'll be glad when this voyage is over," said Steadman again and again. He had grown to love the young second mate, for he had seen in him that quiet, resourceful courage which means true manliness. He leaned on Leigh as upon a strong support, and made no secret of his dependence upon his junior.

"We'll struggle through all right," said Leigh optimistically, and, catching a glimpse of Aileen's face as the girl stood at the top of the companionway in obedience to her father's injunctions to seek fresh air, he smiled brightly, that no suspicion of the true

state of affairs might be conveyed to her mind.

"I hope so—I hope so, Leigh. But Long Jake's getting sulkier than ever, and he's got one of his own kidneys in that chap Morgan. God help us if the two strike out! I don't like it."

They walked, these days, as if upon a mine that might explode at any moment and blow them to perdition. At one time Steadman resolved to single out the most truculent of the crew and confine them below, but then again he hesitated to precipitate an uprising. The old man's vim was going; he seemed to have lost much of his old authority, and daily he leaned more and more on Leigh.

"We'll keep 'em working," said the second mate. "Let these new men get up the cable and scrape it well, and they'll be too tired to think of anything but their beds when that's done." The suggestion was acted upon at once. Leigh walked forward and knocked upon the forecastle door.

"Turn out, the watch on deck," he said, "and get up the starboard cable. Bosun, see the thing is properly scraped and tarred." He stood there on

deck as the men came out, and his face grew thoughtful. They were, as Steadman said, a choice collection of ruffians. The new-comers were, if anything, worse than the old, but still, an officer was an officer, and Leigh, being young, prided himself on his ability to obtain obedience from his men.

"That's given them something to think about," he said brightly, returning to the poop, and indicating the steady ring and scrape of hammer and sledge on the rusted steel. "It's Bray's watch on deck, so I'll just give him a tip to keep things moving. Here he comes."

Bray was something of a fighter, a lad without fear. He laughed when Leigh took him aside and voiced Steadman's fears.

"Old cocks, do crow, don't they, sir?" he said youthfully. "I'll haze the brutes if they try any monkey tricks on me."

(To be continued)

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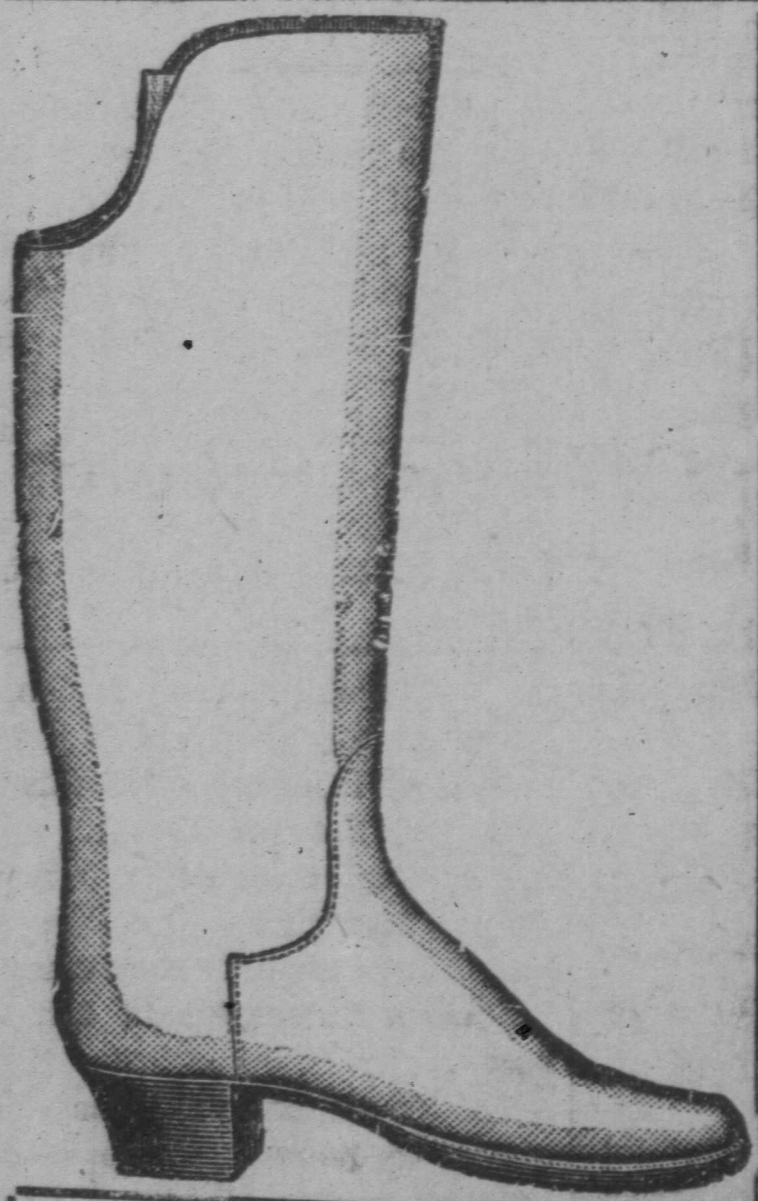
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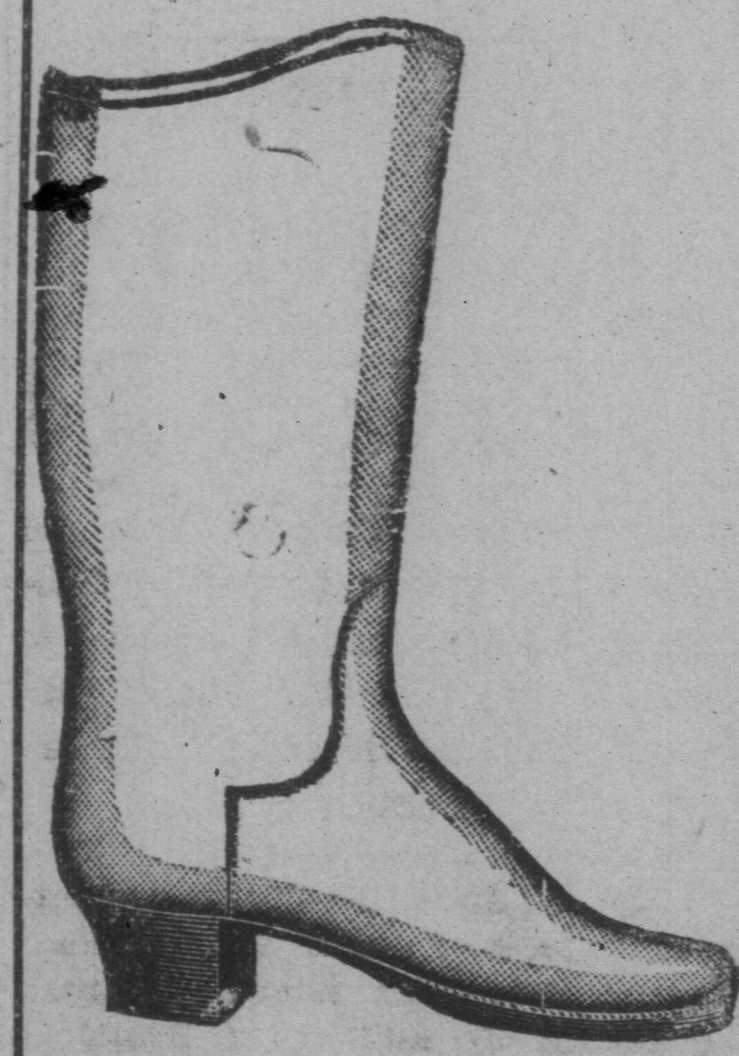
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