

# A DAUGHTER OF THE STORM!

BY CAPT. FRANK H. SHAW.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### A Warning Of The Storm.

(Continued)

Leigh stood pantingly before them, the sweat dripping from every pore. Even yet he hardly realized what had happened: he lived in a dazed world peopled by shadowy forms that gibbered and mowed at him from chaotic darkness. But the men were not to know this. To them he was a terrific figure as he stood there, the batten across one shoulder, his face fixed in an awful glare. One combined movement on the part of the mutineers would have carried the day at that moment, for Leigh was shivering back to consciousness, was all amazed, undermined. He knew dimly that he had struck furious blows, but of their result he could not say. There was a movement amongst the packed mass of men: one broad shouldered Italian, in which the spirituous stuff was still working strongly, stepped forward a pace, crouching evilly, something glittering dully in his hand. Leigh saw nothing of his motion, saw nothing of the menacing steel.

Something was thrust into his hand from behind, his fingers closed on it instinctively and with a thrill he realized that he held a revolver. Where it had come from he could not say—it was purely Providential, but he welcomed the kindly roughness of the butt as the hand-clasp of a long-dead friend. And with the touch of the weapon his senses came back swiftly, so that he saw and understood.

Captain Curzon had listened to the uproar on deck, had heard the sharp twang of revolver fire, the thud of falling men. He had heard more—

though dimly. He had heard Leigh's stern commands, Alleen's voice, Stubbs' ferocious curses, later his daughter's agony-shrill screamings. And through it all he had been compelled to lie in his room, helpless as a corpse. He reckoned up the situation swiftly. The ship was overpowered, he said—that scream told of his daughter's fate. Somehow or other he must get on deck, bear a hand in the work. He strove to rise, but his paralyzed limbs held him back suddenly. He writhed in hopeless anguish there, the sweat dripping from his forehead, his mouth worked convulsively. Then he shouted. No answer came. He shouted again, and again, but his voice was all unheard. No one was there to hear—he realized it with a cold rash of horror. He waited for a few moments inert, limp, expecting every second to hear the rust of feet down the companionway, to see his doorway crowded with evil faces. He set his teeth as he resolved that every shot in the revolver held should at least buy one man's life.

There was a shambling shuffle at the door, someone was coming. He raised himself one inch, the revolver muzzle glinted in the lamp-light.

"Who's that?" There was no hesitation now—it rang clear and true.

"Show yourself, or I'll shoot."

"Don't shoot, sar. I think de devil's to pay up dere on deck."

A figure slowly rose from the ground and revealed itself as the half-caste steward, his teeth singing with fright. He, of all the crew, had not been taken into confidence by the mutineers, for fear lest his constant presence in the cabin should result in the conspiracy being brought to

light. And now he was here, white-livered, wholly afraid, but a friend.

Barely had he raised himself when another heart-stopping scream rang out from the deck. It was succeeded by a swift rush of feet, the thud of a falling blow, and then—even Curzon's blood chilled to that fearful yell from Stubbs' gaping throat. But it showed him that the fight still went on—someone of the afterguard still lived. Who it was he did not know, but someone official remained. He thought with the speed of light. His daughter had gone on deck, bearing the first revolver. He had heard four shots fired—probably enough Alleen had fired them. Then had followed the screams and the struggling—Alleen still lived, but she was helpless, disarmed. Whoever remained would need protection of a sort. He called the steward to him imperiously.

"Listen to me," he said in a low, hissing voice. "Take this pistol. Go on deck, and give it to one of the officers. I've understood."

"Yes, sar, I understand, but I'm dreadful scared, sar."

"Get out, or I'll shoot you where you stand. Quick, now, quick!"

He came of a race born to serve, that half-caste steward. All his life he had down to obey the word of command, and discipline was stronger than his fear. Though his teeth chattered mournfully, though very limb trembled like an aspen, though his blood turned to ice and his bowels to water, he took the revolver and crept fearlessly to the deck. He might have hidden away from the captain's sight, knowing him helpless; he might have turned the weapon upon Curzon, and shot him where he lay; but he did neither. In his dull brain the command held paramount place, and he obeyed it to the letter. For one dreadful second he swung in the doorway of the chart-house, his eyes roving the darkness, singling out shapes. Gradually, as he became accustomed to the gloom, he made out the panting, undecided



mass of the crew beside the wheel; the one erect figure before them, with the bar held over one shoulder menacingly. Dropping on hands and knees, he crept aft; the revolver held muzzlewise and thrust it into Leigh's grip. Then, without a second's look, he scuttled back to cover like a rabbit.

Leigh's head was ringing madly, a strange nausea seemed to bear him down—fire wheeled and flashed before his eyes weirdly. But as if that friendly pistol-but had held a concealed magnetic current, he braced himself, saw the crouching Italian, guessed at the deadly knife. His hand flew up, the click of the cocked hammer sounded through the roar.

"Drop your arms!"

He said it quite unemotionally, but there was that in the click of steel in the tense poise of the man, that checked the rush at its birth. Something tinkled to the deck, the Italian drew upright, his arms folded, the scowling malignity of his face giving place to white-lipped fear.

"The first man that moves I shoot," said Leigh, still coldly and without passion, and the stronger will prevailed. He held them there helpless—not one man of all those men dared make a rush with that revolver muzzle held threateningly—a 32-calibre barrel kept twenty men down completely, as though oppressed by heavy weights.

One man shuffled uneasily, cleared his throat, lifted his hands above his head and stepped forward. The pistol covered him like a flash.

"Stand back!"

"I no mean harm, sar. I give in. I kill no one, nor see my hands."

"Stand back!" Leigh's voice was weary beneath its sternness, for a growing listlessness seemed to steel

him, fibre and nerve. But he must think, must hold out for so long as was necessary to make arrangements that would prohibit such a rising again. What could he do? He was one man—here, by reason of the proverbial revolver, he held command of the situation completely. But here the men were en masse, one muzzle dominated the whole crew. It would be different did he allow them to break up into units—every man would be a menace, and he was quick to understand that the fear of death or punishment would render them still aggressive. He racked his brains for a solution, none would come. He saw he was slipping away from life, the whirling fires before his eyes rolled and scorched, but he gritted his teeth together, and still stood upright. There was a sighing groan from behind him; something stirred without turning, he spoke:

"Are you awake, Alleen?"

"Yes." It was a bewildered voice; Alleen, awakening from her swoon, still thought she was in Stubbs' revolting clasp. But she stretched her arms abroad and found she was free, lying across the skylight, with the strong rush of the gale fanning her dishevelled hair. The events of the night came back sweepingly, clearing her brain, lifting that weight of dread from her senses. She made an effort and rose to her feet, stood beside Leigh, took in the situation.

"You've held them down?"

"Yes, I've got them in check; but I don't know what to do with them. One man can't handle them. Say, though—can you grip yourself?"

"Try me." She laughed a low, confident laugh. In Stubbs' grasp she had become a very woman, fearing nameless things, now she was something more, the child of storm, resolute, determined, one on whom to rely.

"Take this pistol, then. If any man stirs until I give the word, shoot him."

He spoke loudly, pausing between each word, that the full effect of his

reasoning might penetrate not only to her brain but to the understanding of those he dominated. Alleen took the pistol and ran the cylinder round under her fingers. "Loaded, of course?"

"Yes. Now, I've got a plan. Thank God you wakened in time. Stay with me. I'm going to drive these brutes forward, and shut them in the forepeak. Once down there, with locked battens over them, they'll have time to come to their senses. We'll starve them into obedience, and if they try tricks, we'll shoot!"

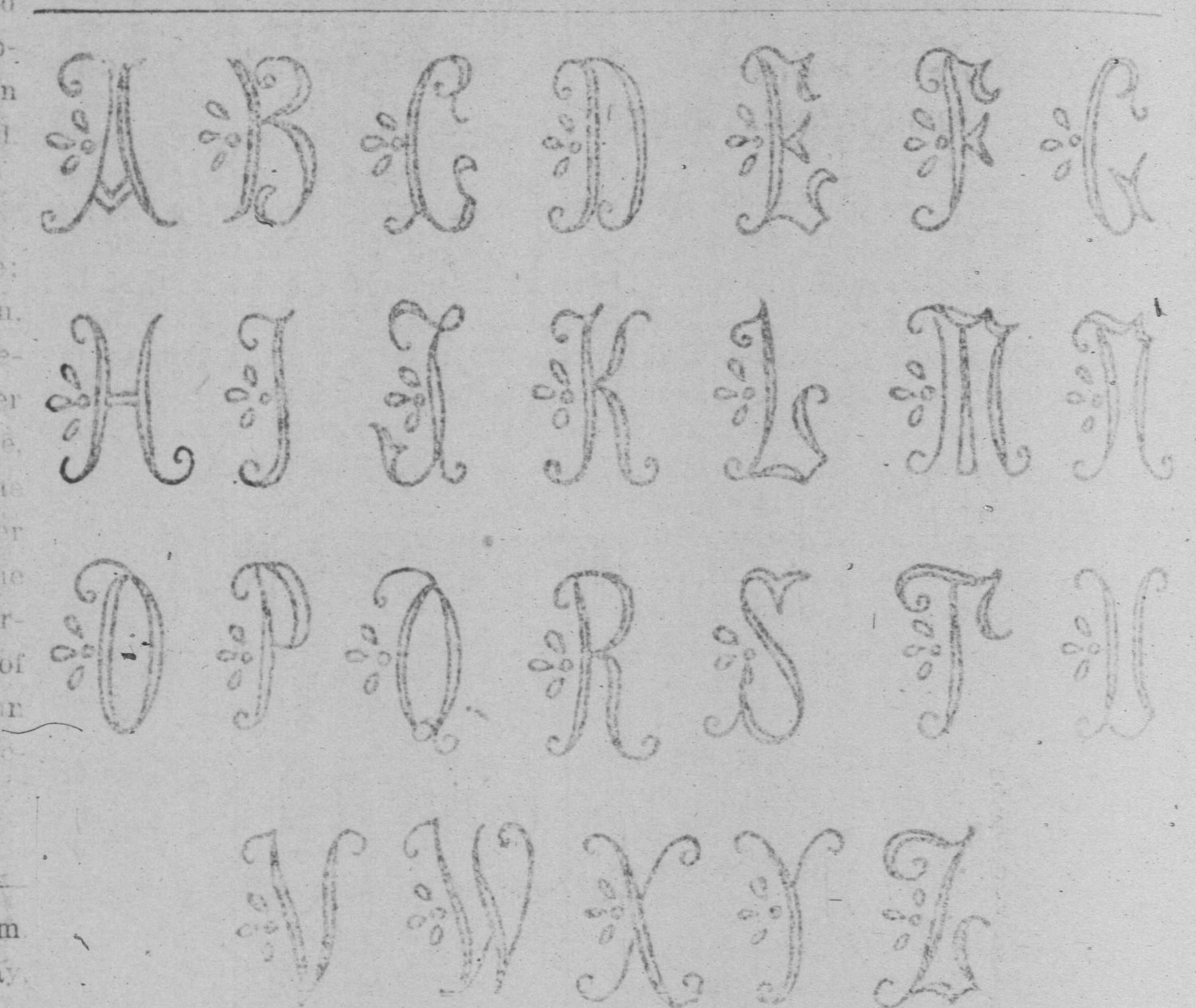
"But—the ship?" Alleen asked the Zoroaster's plight. She was torn, of either and tither, the sport of every squall. It seemed impossible to manage her without a crew. But Leigh had made up his mind.

"So long as one of these men is free we're in danger. The only thing to do is to put them out of the road. Afterwards we'll think of the ship." He swung his iron bar above his shoulder and looked scornfully at the conquered.

(To be continued)

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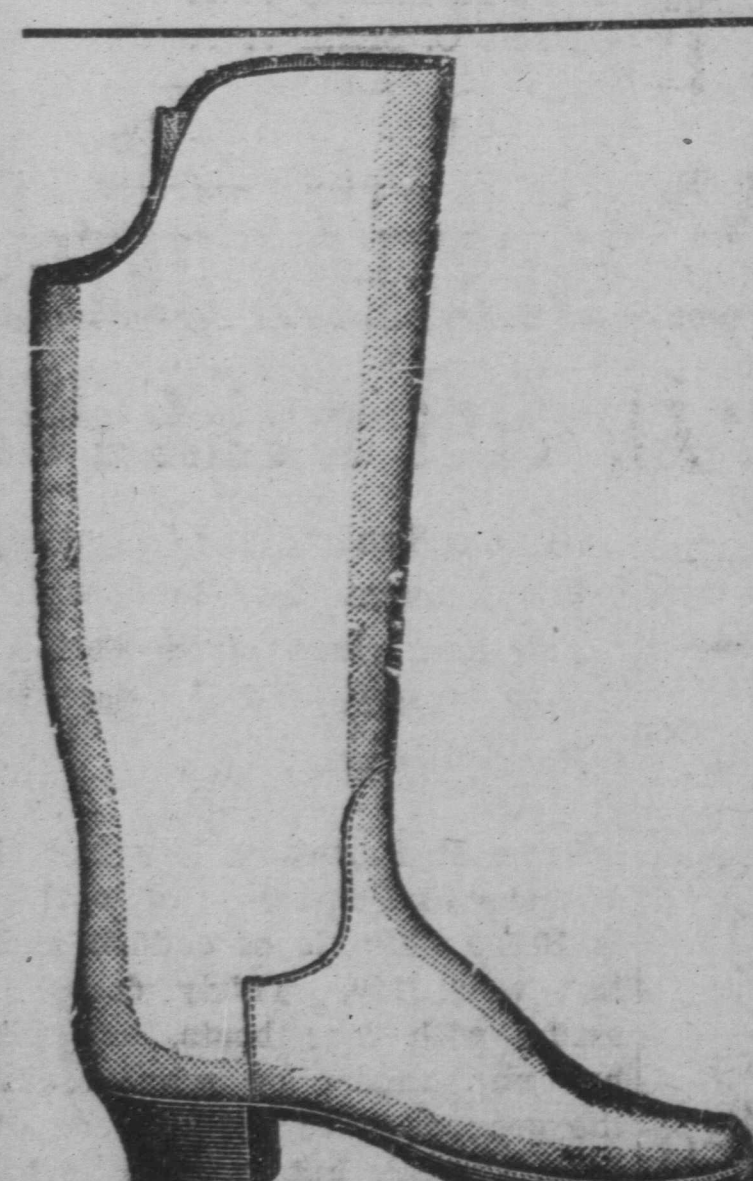
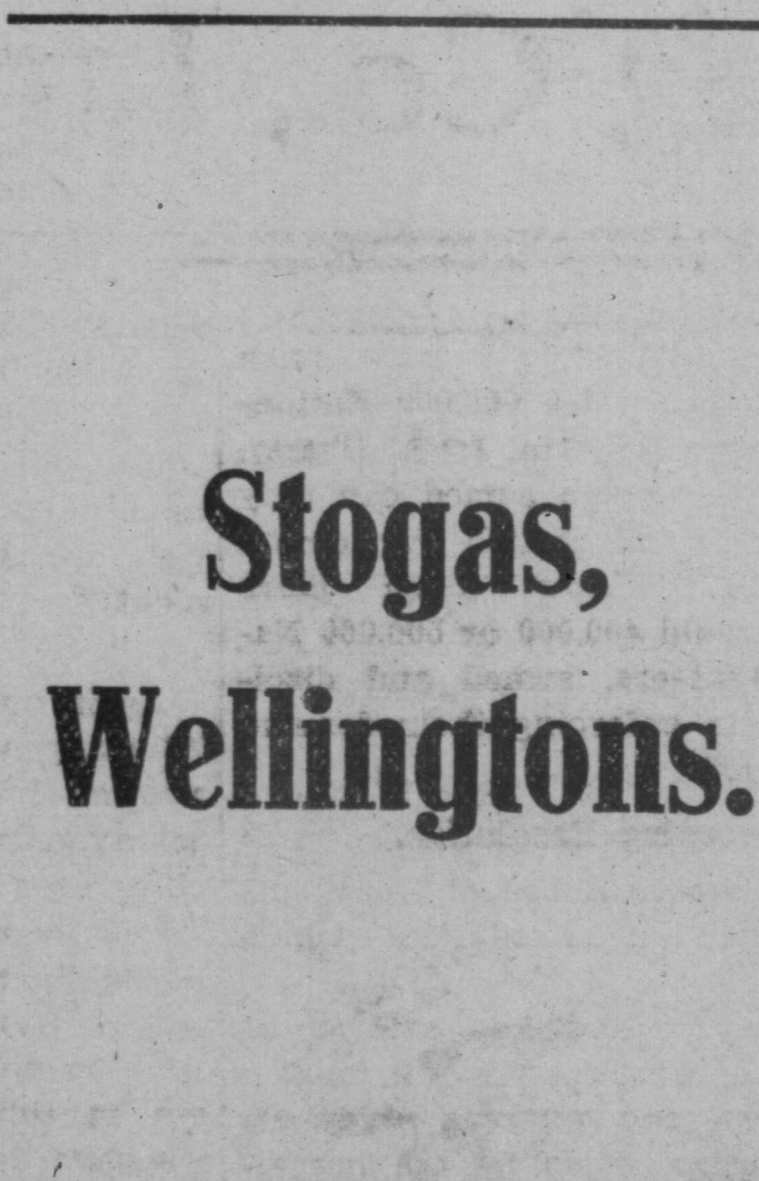
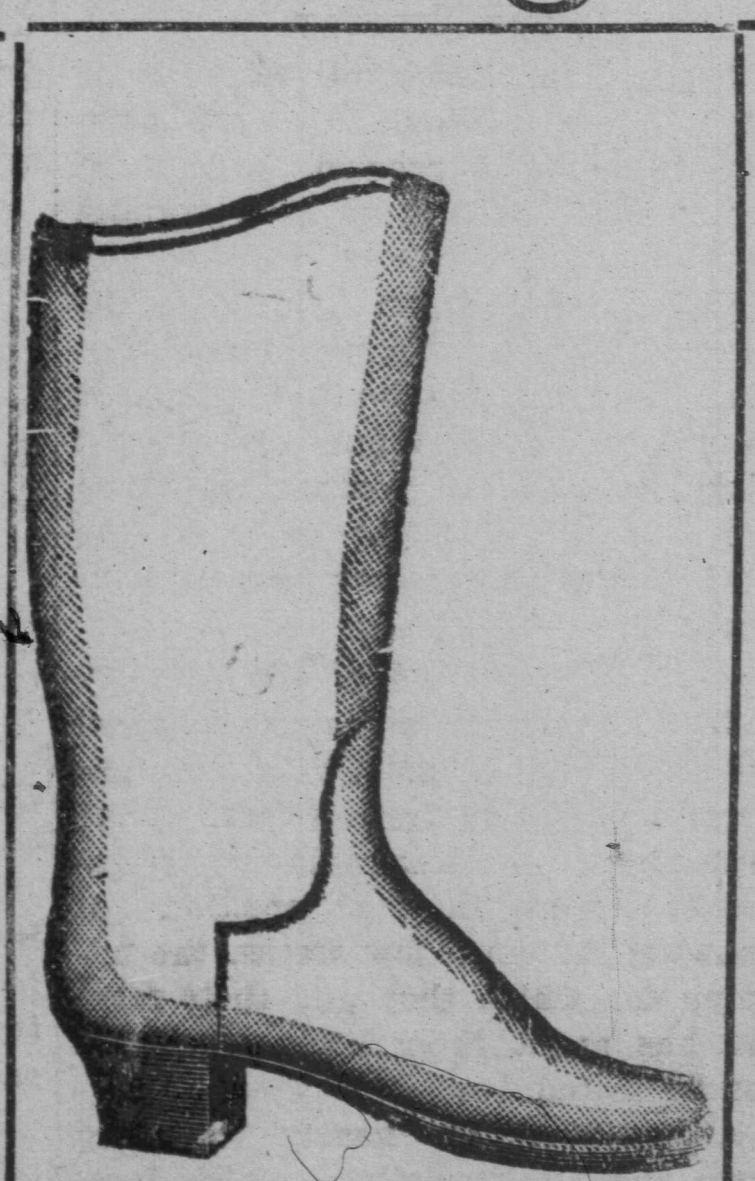
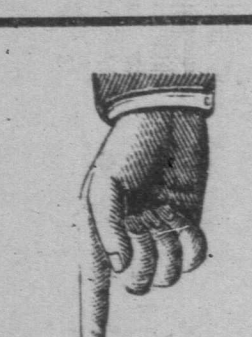
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