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**A DAUGHTER OF THE STORM!**  
BY CAPT. FRANK H. SHAW.

CHAPTER XXXII.  
The Track Of The Storm.

(Continued)

Forward she went, her eyes seeking fascinatedly for yet other signs of the horrors the night had brought. But the traces were lessened here. Nay, more than that, there seemed an atmosphere of something approaching comfort, for a fire crackled and blazed gaily in the galley, and the half-caste steward was busy with the preparation of coffee. He came towards her bearing an unclean pannikin of the steaming beverage—he was a miserable object, drenched from head to foot, grimy, with the traces of his fear writ largely over his ugly face; but he smiled, and pressed the pannikin into her hands. Aileen drank deeply, and the warm stuff brought fresh life to her aching limbs, brought something of a flush to her cheek.

"It's terrible, missy, just terrible," stammered the steward, carving an unlovely slice of bread from a loaf, and smearing it thickly with butter, for even on her passage along the decks she had been the plaything of flying spindrift, but she took no heed of this. Some sinister gouts on the sill of the fore-caste door gave her pause. She eyed them reverently—putting two and two together, she said it was Steadman's blood.

Further forward still, right into the bows. There was no sound coming from the rough prison below her feet

might give vent to the turbulent feelings of his heart, but not now. She was weak—she might look on him as from a dark place into brightness, he dazzled by what had passed. So he bit back the words, and glanced carelessly aloft.

"Oh, thank God for a brave man!" cried the girl impulsively, and she threw her hands forward with all her old free abandon. Leigh caught them and held them fast, his heart beating tumultuously. Still he said nothing, nay, he dared not even let his eyes rest on her young and emotional face.

Aileen relinquished her clasp of his fingers, and was turning away when Leigh lowered his eyes to rest on the wavy tendrils of hair about her neck. "I've been wondering," he said slowly. "There's a lot to wonder about. I remember seeing you in the doorway—before the last fight. I mean, you know. Then something hit me from behind. I can't tell they didn't kill me, and why, when I came to my senses, I was lying inside the chart-room. I know I didn't fall there. I wonder how I got inside. They'd have killed me if I'd fallen amongst them."

"I pulled you in," said Aileen with-out turning.

"You—pulled me in!" His voice expressed incredulity. "You! Why, you're a slip of a girl—and then, how did you manage to hold them off?" She pointed shudderingly to dead men lying in the alley way between chart-room and skylight, and Leigh understood.

"My God!" he said reverently, seeking her averted eyes. Then, with

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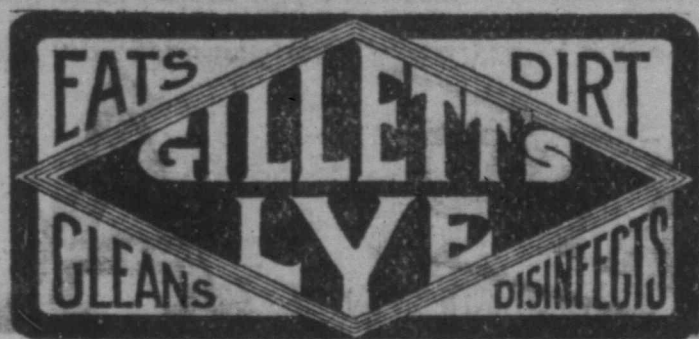
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something of a laugh: "But—how did you manage it? I'm a big man, I weigh heavy. You're only a girl—a slip of a girl. Where did you find strength?"

Suddenly she moved uneasily, and as he waited for her answer, all breathless, she turned and flashed on him the full light of her marvellous eyes—eyes that shone like tropical stars in spite of their weariness. He caught his breath, his face worked at the wonderful revelation written there.

"Was it—that?" he asked in a low voice, leaning forward over the wheel spokes. He was trembling now, his knees shook. Should he take advantage of her helplessness to win a confession from her? She was carried out of herself—the man's brave soul realised that without even the aid of his eyes. But—was it possible to mistake the witching marvel of her glance?

"Was it that?" he repeated, half choking with a new wave of emotion. She stared at him for a while without speaking, her eyes searching his face. What she read there only Aileen knew. But as he gazed, the beat of his heart sounding loudly in his ears, she nodded slightly, then turned away.

"Yes," she whispered, "it was that." And the wheel swung idly to and fro as Leigh darted forward.

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soughting itself away into fretful fuming, and Leigh, his face aglow, took a lashing round the steady wheel, and called the steward on deck. There was much to be done before Aileen reappeared—he would not have his sweetheart's eyes polluted again by the ghastly sights about the deck. She had gone below, submissively obedient to his stern command, with his kisses hot on her lips; and an hour before the half-caste steward had told him that she slept. He thanked God as he watched the revelations of the daylight—he dwelt fondly on the memories of Aileen's wonderful surrender. She was his—how she had come to that understanding heart. He did not stop to ask himself. Afterwards he would understand all things—would know why the woman who had once called him coward had now given to him her whole loving heart. Meanwhile there was work to be done—grim traces to be removed from the before the light of day.

The steward came shamblingly, yet he chattered vociferously as he came. Peril was over, and he was essentially a man of peace. He looked once at the awful object lying down beside the vang to starboard, and then straightened himself.

"Yes, sar?"

"Come along with me, and bear a hand. You've got to work like a slave now, my lad—remember that, Captain Curzon quiet?"

"He's fast asleep, sar. So is young Missy."

"That's good, steward. Come this way. Now, take his feet, while I take his head. So—watch yourself!" They

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picked up the dead body of the boat-swain, and bore it to the rail. A grey backed wave swung high, and seemed to lick him from their grasp—they murmured no words of prayer over the swiftly engulfed corpse. There was no time for that. Long Jake was dislodged from his holding, and he followed the body of the boat-swain—his requiem was unworried cursing from Stubbs' wounded throat. One by one they disposed of the bodies of the mutineers, and when the last was gone, it was Leigh himself who manned a draw-bucket and hauled aboard gallon after gallon of clean, pure seawater, the steward scrubbing vigorously with coir broom and swab, so that the traces of the mad struggle were completely effaced. As yet Leigh had given Stubbs no thought, but when the bodies of Steadman and Bray were laid gently on the stree cushions of the chart-room, he spared time to tend the sorely stricken man.

"Get the medicine-chest on deck," he said, bending over Stubbs, tracing the awful results of his smashing blow with a curious loathing. Stubbs moved slightly—one arm was below his body. In the hours that had passed some semblance of reason had come to that brandy-distorted brain, and his groping hand had found a knife lying idly by. The knife was in his hand now, beneath the inert body, but though Stubbs called upon his strength madly he could not drag the weapon free. Leigh heard him groan, and stooped lower.

"You want turning over?" he asked, forgetting his enmity to the man in the sight of his suffering. An inarticulate groan answered him; he turned him on his back. Stubbs summoned up his powers now, and drove upwards with the freed knife. Leigh saw nothing of the steel, he was watching the awful face for some signs of questioning. But someone

else saw the dastardly attempt. The steward, returning with the medicine chest, saw it, and dropped the box with a clatter. For one moment in his unheroic life the half-caste rose superior to himself. He darted forward and flung himself upon the writhing body, clutching at the murderous wrist, wrenching the keen steel clear.

"He try to kill you, sar!" he panted. "See dis." And he held out the captured knife.

Leigh fell back from the scoundrel, and his face flushed darkly. It was well for Stubbs in that moment that his face was a scar on the fair day, else the second mate's hands must inevitably have closed about the tortured throat. As it was, Leigh's hands were arrested in mid-career—he shook violently.

"Search him and see if he's any more weapons," he said. "He's a mad dog simply." A hasty search revealed nothing, and Leigh at once busied himself with the horrid wound.

"We'll save you for the hangman, anyhow," he said grimly, as he bathed and bandaged. "Now, you've fixed up all right. Steward, get some condensed milk and pour it down his throat."

Morton Leigh was a man who made up his mind swiftly in an emergency. He saw at once that to leave Stubbs at large, to place him in comfort in a spare cabin—there was one spare cabin below now, one that Steadman had occupied for more than twenty years—was to invite further catastrophe. The man was so deeply imbued with the killing lust that he would lose no opportunity of putting accusation and possible condemnation out of reach forever.

(To be continued)

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