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## GEORGE KNOWLING.

mar2161.ctd

## A DAUGHTER OF THE STORM!

BY CAPT. FRANK H. SHAW.

### CHAPTER XII

#### Its Fulfillment.

(Continued.)

"But, Miss Curzon; it's not possible. Why, if anybody found it out there'd be no end of a row."

"You won't suffer, anyhow," said Aileen with proud disdain. "Never mind. I thought between chums such a thing would have been only a matter of course."

"I'd love to help you, but—pshaw! Isn't it just amazing a trifle?"

"No. Look here, Leigh—Aileen disdained the Mr.—"I'll get solitary confinement to-night, and then I'll slip out and meet you on the cliff. Then we can talk it over."

It was a biting, raw, altogether unlovely day towards the end of November. The chestnut-tree was denuded of its last leaves, but Aileen had deftly placed the bole between herself and possible observation. Leigh stood on the path—the road was very quiet—and looked upwards.

"But to stow away!" he protested.

"It's the only chance there is," said Aileen decisively. "Of course, if you're going to funk it, there's no need to say anything more about it. Still, I thought that as we're chums, and both sailors, you might bear a hand. I'll need some one to carry my bag, you know; and, besides, if people saw a girl about the docks they'd begin to wonder."

"But your father'll be in an awful wax," demurred Leigh. Aileen swung

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gested was painfully easy. His own ship, the Albemarle, was due to sail in a week or two, and she lay alongside the Zoroaster in dock. She had shifted her berth only that very day. To hide the girl aboard his ship until an auspicious moment arrived was the easiest thing in the world.

"Very well; I'll do it," he said desperately. Aileen turned impulsively and held out her hand. Then—she was only seventeen, remember—she reached forward and kissed him full on the mouth.

"I say—don't do that!" cried Leigh hoarsely, aware of hitherto unstirred currents of electricity surging through him. He turned his face away, and Aileen, bewildered, fearful at the time lest this strong rock of hope should be torn from her, respected his silence. Leigh had had a new birth in one moment. The touch of her lips, as cool and unimpassioned as woman's lips well could be, had filled him with something indefinable. He vaguely understood that he would be in a seventh heaven of delight if only the Albemarle were bound for the same port as the Zoroaster. But that was not to be.

"Yes, I'll help you," he said, turning to her again. "Let's arrange it all now." And thereafter they put their young heads together and devised a skilful plan for the outwitting of Captain Curzon.

For Aileen, once the details were

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arranged, time passed with cruel slowness. She was perforce compelled to be on her best behaviour lest a bad report should be tendered to her father on his farewell visit; but she took advantage of the greater freedom which rewarded this excellent record to fill that invaluable kit-bag with everything that a girl likely to be away from civilisation for three or four days. He purchased a variety of strange foods—the things that apprentice love—and packed them all away securely in his own leather valise. The question of drinking puzzled him for a while, but a skirmishing invasion of his mother's pantry gave him half a dozen quart bottles, and these he filled, corked securely, and added to his growing stock. On the night of the twenty-fourth of November all was in readiness.

Aileen had counted the hours almost breathlessly. Her father, when she met him with eyes from which she had in vain tried to eliminate the sparkle,

sighed and said she was forgetting him already and made a still more desperate resolve to cut loose from the sea after this voyage was done. But just as he said "Good-bye," Aileen once more threw herself upon his broad chest, and asked tearfully if he would never be angry with her, no matter what she did. He kissed her again and again, yet in his mind that new-born wonder still held sway.

Out he was safely out of the house, Aileen let herself run riot. She drove the Misses Learoyd almost to dis traction. It was not from malice, but from sheer exuberance of spirits at the near approach of her long-looked-forward-to scheme's fulfilment. Human nature cannot endure too long. Miss Selina, lips compressed and hands shaking, frowned Aileen into frightened submission, and then issued the awful mandate: "Three days' solitary confinement." Aileen nearly let out the whole glad secret, but restrained herself in time. This was exactly what she needed. The kit-bag was packed and stowed away in an out-house—nothing remained to be done.

But it must be confessed there was a strange huskiness in her throat as she took her last glance about the room in which she had spent so many hours. It was the school-prison—undesirable, but still she left it with regret—regret that turned to nothing but pure joy as she slipped down the rain-pipe, and it was answered from the shadows. Leigh came forward, his face shining, and, although he would have denied it strongly, his

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heart thumping against his breast. "There's a train to London in a quarter of an hour," he said. "I've got a cab at the corner. Where's the bag?" Aileen directed him to it; and so between them, exactly like two sailors rejoining their ship after a spell ashore, they shouldered the "dunnage" and set off. The cab picked them up, the cabman mildly blasphemous at the sight; they gained the station unobserved, and then shook hands gravely in a third-class compartment.

"I thought we might make doubly sure," said Leigh, after he had run through the list of comestibles in the bag, "so I brought my old oilskin coat. It's long, and it will hide your dress. As it's a wet night, you can stick my sou'-wester on your head, and no one will know you from a dock rat."

It was not a high compliment, but Aileen appreciated the motive. Now that the affair was actually in progress she felt a queer nervousness. She wondered what would happen at the Misses Learoyd's establishment when her disappearance was discovered, and pictured her father's agony of mind if he should receive a wire from the ladies at the last moment. But Aileen comforted herself with her knowledge of the schoolmistresses' characteristics. They would fall into a profound fright on detecting her absence, but they would be so jealous for the good standing of the school that they would hold out until the last minute, and would thus be too late. Once on the green water of the Channel, and she could snap her fingers at any chance of detection.

A thin rain was making dock-land doubly unpleasant when the pair reached that delectable spot. A crowd of drunken, shouting sailors were reeling down towards the wharf of the tidal basin, and Aileen shuddered a little at their talk. They were not the best type of men—very different from those of the sea, and as such were friends. Aileen had a dim eye for sailorly peccadilloes.

(To be continued)

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