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A DAUGHTER OF THE STORM!

BY CAPT. FRANK H. SHAW.

CHAPTER XIII.

Its Fulfillment.

(Continued)

"You sit tight here," said Leigh in a stage whisper as he brought the girl to safe harbourage in the Albemarle's halfdeck, which in ordinary English means the apprentices' quarters aboard a sailing vessel, and is usually a deck-house forward of the poop. The place was grimy and foul, it smelt of the dead things of the sea, but Aileen did not mind. More than that, her eyes sparkled as Leigh lit a cautious candle and objects became dimly visible. A pile of cordage lay in one quarter, a raffle of canvas in another—the place was like home to the girl. In here dwelt lads who were akin to her in the great ocean brotherhood—gallant lads, strong and fearless. What though it was dirty, what though the moisture hung pendent from every bolt-head in the roof-beams—heroes made it their abiding-place, and as such it was a hallowed spot.

They had weathered the possibility of detection by this time; the long oil-skin coat had proved an effectual disguise. Not a soul of all the men they had accosted and passed had troubled to cast more than a single glance at the waterproof-shrouded figure.

Leigh disappeared, and Aileen peered out from the open port in the bulkhead. The stokers were finishing their work aboard the old Zoroaster—she could hear them stowing the last cases in the after-hatch. One gang was placing the stout wooden hatchets

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in place over the other gaping apertures in the ship's deck, presently, she said, the carpenters would happen along, and with batten and hardwood wedge, driven home by shrewd blows of the ponderous maul, they would fix the water-resisting tarpaulins in place, and the ship would be ready for sea. It was very good—it was what she had pined for for seven long years, this salt-scented atmosphere, with its tone of strenuous striving.

"The tea isn't what you might call delicate," said Leigh, returning, "but it's hot. Old Rhys was just making his supper, so I boned a pannikin full of his drink." It was scalding hot, it was milkiness, sweetened with coarse sugar, and she drank out of a chipped enamelled pannikin that had crossed the Line a score of times; but to Aileen that cup of tea, at the bottom of which reposed leaves which the wildest imagination could not construe as coming from a tea-plant, was nectar. She set the pannikin down with a sigh of gratitude, and nibbled with strong white teeth—not too small, but capable, as a sailor's teeth—not too small, but capable, as a sailor's teeth should be—at a liberally but tored biscuit. Once or twice during the waiting for Leigh's return a sense of fear had obsessed the girl but the scalding beverage restored her confidence. After all, it was only the first plunge that counted.

"I want to see Rhys," she said of a sudden. "I wonder if he's remembered me?" And, without waiting for Leigh's lead, she skipped over the high step of the doorway and ran along to the galley, tripping over innumerable "Rhys!" she exclaimed to a bowed and wizened figure that crouched over the galley fire, smoking a short clay pipe. The tobacco was strong and brought the salt tears to her eyes. She felt a hot drop slide down her cheek, and dashed it away impatiently. Was this Rhys? This shivering, rheumatically hobbling man? The sea takes a heavy toll from those who serve her faithfully and well, and Rhys had not escaped the natural aftermath of long days and nights in steaming, salt-soaked clothing.

"Why, it's Miss Aileen!" The old tar's face, brown and wrinkled like warped mahogany, shone in the fire-glow. He came towards her, removing his pipe and touching a bald forehead. Out went the girl's two hands in a free, impulsive gesture, and, stooping, she kissed the gnarled forehead.

"That's better than heaven, my dear," mumbled Rhys. "En, to be sure! It's the little 'un herself. But seat ye, seat ye—the night's raw and

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cold. What might ye be doin' here at this time o' night?"

"Oh, Rhys, it's too good for words. Father won't let me go to sea with him, and so I'm stowing away on the old ship." Rhys's face grew long, his jaw fell.

"Stowin' away? Dearie me! But hadn't you better go to the cap't. my dear, an' ask him to let you go as a lady should?"

"You can't understand, Rhys dear. He'd say no, and I'd be compelled to stay behind. And I can't—I just can't. I must go to sea or I'll die."

Rhys chuckled. "They got me a job ashore when I'd been to sea a matter o' fower year," he said. "I chuckled it in a week. Aye, aye, I know. Who shouldn't? So ye're going to stow away? Well, well!" He looked a question at his fair guest ere resuming his pipe, for this rough salt was by way of being a gentleman in many respects.

"See, Rhys, I hoped I might see you, and so I brought you this." Aileen thrust a hand into her pocket and produced a pipe, such a pipe as a woman would buy, silver everywhere. This she pressed into the sailor's hands, turning away to escape his thanks. He eyed it thoughtfully; then, wrapping it carefully in paper, he stowed it away in a little canvas ditty bag at his side.

"Aye, aye, it's the little 'un, right enough," he muttered. "An' she re-

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out-throw of her firm young hands, and seized his.

"I'm sorry," she cried. "I'd let the last seven years slip by." And Leigh flushed hotly, abusing himself for his sullen mood.

They watched their chance, and darted on to the Zoroaster's deck. It was quite quiet. The hatches were in place on the after-hatch, but the carpenters had not yet appeared to drive home the wedges. Rhys and Leigh lifted one hatch, dropped down into the hold, Rhys lighted the lamp he carried, and they rapidly surveyed the accommodation of the vast chamber. A natural resting-place was formed between two huge packing-cases; close to the cases lay a pile of clean straw mats. The two men bustled them selves to good effect, so that in five minutes the mats were laid in a soft heap between the cases, Rhys's blanket was laid over all, and there, ready made, was as snug as a bed as woman's heart could desire. Aileen clapped her hands delightedly when she saw what had been done. It was an ideal place for concealment, so far away from the hatchway as to preclude any possibility of detection at a cursory glance. It was but a few feet away from a small open ventilator, which guaranteed a full supply of fresh air. There was no fear of the ventilator being closed yet awhile—the Channel seas were not big enough to warrant that. Aileen arranged her goods and chattels to her hand and squatted cross-legged on the mats.

"You'd better go now," she said to

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Leigh, with a breathless little laugh.

"I feel sleepy, and you'll have to find somewhere to sleep, too."

They left her after a while, Leigh reluctantly, Rhys with a look on his face as if he had come to a sudden resolution. But ere they climbed the hatchway Aileen was with them.

"I—I can't thank you," she said to Leigh softly, holding both his hands; "but—there." Once again her soft young lips rested on his cheek, and the lad flushed, his heart stinging painfully. He had been kissed before, but never to such effect. He swung round on his heel, his arms wide-spread, but Aileen was swaying before him in virginal aloofness. After all, the kiss had been one of pure gratitude. But Leigh set his teeth as he climbed the ladder and made a silent bow.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Sequel to the Great Idea.

Aileen snuggled herself down on the soft matting and listened to the silence. It was very dark; most women would have been afraid, but the wild exaltation that always came to the girl in darkness and loneliness upbore her against such weakness. Gradually little sounds that had merged into the silence began to assert themselves. The soft-footed scamper of a predatory rat took on alarming proportions and became the swooping rush of marching armies. The purring lap of water outboard seemed to fill the night with sound—the screeching yell of a dock tug brought her to her knees, trembling and afraid. But her dulling senses played her fair—she settled back with a sigh of relief.

After all, these sounds were sea sounds, friendly tokens that before another day dawned she would be away from the land and its trammels. She dozed off presently, but awoke with a start, as a clattering tumult overhead dinned on her ears. There were some strange squishy thuds, succeeded by the heavy tramp of feet, hash, guttural voices impinged on her ears, and at some of the words she, not understanding, bit her lips. Then arose the sounds of an altercation, the soft, crushing thud of blows on flesh, a crash announced a drunken fall, and there were more fierce oaths, afterwards silence. The crew were coming aboard, as was their wont, and some of them had fallen into a liquor-bred quarrel. That was all; there was no cause for uneasiness.

(To be continued)

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