

## A DAUGHTER OF THE STORM!

BY CAPT. FRANK H. SHAW.

### CHAPTER XVII.

#### The End of Aileen's Voyage.

(Continued)

This was her sea, the sea she loved, and beautiful in her eyes. And then her eyes travelled towards the north and east. She screened her brow with one firm hand and stiffened, peering intently. All thrillingly her clear young voice rang down to those who stood below: "Land ho!" The high, blue land of western England was there before her eyes, and some unaccountable prickling was at the back of her throat. She had not seen England for three years, and though in her heart she loathed the land, yet this was England, her England, who owed her very existence to the sea.

The sun had set, and the English lights were flickering a welcome to the home-comers, when Aileen and her father sat on the Zoroaster's deck that night. By the wheel the gruff-voiced pilot stood, capable, watchful, with the beginnings of a smile in his eyes, for he, too, had come under the girl's witchery. The sonorous beat of a passing steamer's screw broke the silence as they sat, looking towards the darker streak along the growing darkness that stood for England, and the lights leaped up ashore, dwindled, rose again, to mark their onward way. Aileen dropped her hand on her father's, and squeezed his fingers hard.

"Do you want me to stay ashore now, you old martinet?" she laughed. "Wasn't it worth while, my direct disobedience of orders? Fancy if I'd been compelled to stay ashore all these years!"

"But I've thinking, sweetheart. It isn't just to you. My heart cries out to you every day, but—we've got to

think of you, my lass. Can't you understand what I mean?"

Aileen shook her head. "So long as I'm with you," she flashed, "I'm more than content. You and the sea, dad."

"Ah, but there'll be a time when that won't content you altogether. You're growing to be a woman now, and you need your folk about you. You'll be wanting a sweetheart soon, and you won't find one at sea. I think we'll have to throw up the life, after one more voyage, maybe, and buy a house in some quiet spot, just within sound of the sea to remind us of what's gone before, and then—you'll find some young tennis-playing, smart-eyed youngster trawling about your skirts, resting in your smile, and—what will become of the old dad then, eh?"

Aileen laughed, but under the laugh ran a thin undercurrent of pain.

"You think I'd leave you for any man—and a landsman at that?" she cried. "No, dad, if ever I marry, and that won't be until you're sewn up in a hammock, it will be a sailor. But I won't have you talk like that. A sweetheart, indeed! As if I needed any other sweetheart beyond my dear old dad!"

"Ah, so you think now, my girl; but time brings changes, too. And there'll happen along someone before whom your dad isn't of more account than a bit of shakings. You mustn't ever marry a sailor. It's not the life for a woman—a sailor's wife. She's got too much to bear. Think of the long waitings, the tense suspense, the heart-shivering agony of every gale that blows. You'll find the general run of sailors to-day don't hold with sail; they fly off into steam as soon as they're passed their exams, and go for the liners, where they get some sort of decent treatment. They don't carry wives and children there, Aileen. And if you married such a one, you'd live out your days in a little seafaring colony, where every woman knew the extent of your husband's income, and gauged your character by the amount you spent on dress. I know 'em. Take my advice, and when your time for marrying comes—and Heaven knows I won't stand in your way, though it will be like facing a Cape Horn in a rowing boat to part with you—choose some decent lad who's got no more of the sea about him than a London policeman has."

Aileen's memory served her well. "And what about your words of years ago?" she inquired. "About our service's future?" There was no mock prudery about the girl, be it noted. She knew that destiny would so work out that in the course of time she would become a wife and a mother. She hoped her children would be sons.

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clear-eyed, fearless lads, who would take to the sea as naturally as to the bottle. She longed to give sons to England and the sea when her time for bearing children came.

"Ah, that's different. I was talking about the matter generally. I wasn't meaning you, my girl. No, no; take my word for it—you'll be better to marry a shore-fellow when the right time comes, and what with your good looks and the bit of money that I've managed to scrape together in the better days, you'll be a wife worth having. You can aim high, Aileen, and you needn't be ashamed. There's clean, good blood in your veins, too; there were some who said your mother married beneath her; but, be that as it may, you needn't go begging for a husband."

Aileen rose and ostentatiously stifled a yawn.

"This talk of husband's!" she said scornfully. "I'll tell you my opinions on the subject ten years hence, and they'll be the same as they are now: sailors are the best men in the world."

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CHAPTER XVIII.  
Morton Leigh Passes A Creditable Examination.

The white-haired old examiner drew a slip of paper towards him and wrote on it thoughtfully.

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"You've passed a very creditable examination, Mr. Leigh," he said. "There aren't many men so young who could weather my questioning as successfully. How old do you say you are?"

"Close on twenty-three, sir."

"Aye, aye. And you've got an extra master's ticket. It's not bad, my lad. You ought to go far in your chosen calling. Let's see, you'll be applying for a berth in one of the big lines now. Come to me when you've had your holiday, and I'll give you an introduction to the superintendent of the Palace Line. You're a made man if you once get in there. Good pay, good service, good living."

"Thanks very much, sir. I'll let you know when I'm ready to go to sea. I've passed all my time in sail so far, and the change will be a welcome one."

"Ah, so you think. Well, well, I might be old-fashioned, but to my mind there's nothing quite like sailing ships. I'll grant the life is hard brutal almost, but it used to breed men."

"Look at the pay, sir."

"Ah, it's not much. Still, my lad, pay isn't everything. Try a voyage as mate, and get a command, and you'll

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stand all the better chance of getting on in steam. Good-bye."

Leigh restrained the exultant glee of his brown, clean-shaven face just as long as it took him to get out of the examiner's room, and then his feelings went with a whoop.

"Passed extra, by Jove!" he gloried. "And the promise of an introduction into the Palace Line! I'm a made man. No more rotten old watch-and-watch windjammers for me if I know it."

He had done very creditably, and he was aware of it. He foresaw an endless vista of triumphant progress in his calling, saw himself full commander of a Palace Liner, where the stipend was eight hundred a year and navigation money, and built a dazzling castle in the air. But when he went to the clerk's desk to receive the blue paper that should entitle him, in three days' time, to claim the parchment record of his success, he glanced over a copy of a shipping paper lying open there. And while answering the questions put to him automatically, his roving eye fell on a name that made him start somewhat.

"Ship Zoroaster. Arrived off Gravesend the twentieth."

"Zoroaster," he mused. "That's where that awfully jolly girl is stowed away. By Jove! she was something like! Zoroaster! She a windjammer, too, and I haven't any use for them."

The clerk handed him the paper, he folded it, and put it carefully away. He had served close on seven years at sea to gain that award and its attendant emoluments, but of a sudden that glowing air-castle seemed to become insubstantial and commonplace.

"I wonder—I wonder!" he said, as he tipped the policeman at the door, who read his success in his face. "Now I wonder! The Zoroaster, by Jove! Leigh, my son, you've got to think things over. Fourth of a Palace boat or second of a windjammer. Mate at the most. Which shall it be?" But before his eyes grew up a vision of a laughing, saucy face, wreathed in gold.

"I'll just run down Leadenhall Street, anyhow," he said thoughtfully. (To be continued)

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