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Geo. Knowling.

A DAUGHTER OF THE STORM!

BY CAPT. FRANK H. SHAW.

CHAPTER IX.

"Binnacle Boy!"

(Continued)

"Climbed up," said Aileen demurely. "Think apprentices are the only people who can climb? Not they. At least, I didn't climb all the way; I jumped some of it. Out of the dormitory window, too. I'm in disgrace." This was with extremeunction, as if disgrace were an habitual state of existence. There was no shyness about the girl, in spite of her seventeen years. The old camaraderie of the sea had taken too deep root in her veins to permit of the stately mannerism of the Misses Learoyd ousting it for good and all. She had lived amongst men, men who met as strangers and were sworn chums with in an hour. She was used to the strange, sudden friendships of the sea, which sprung up without reasonable cause and which drag men through dog-like lives so that they might share the lot of a messmate. The sea is a great friend-maker—the lonely watches seem to draw men to men as with bonds of steel.

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"You deserve all you got," said Leigh disgustedly. But Aileen flashed a smile at him from her leafy eye, and he relented.

"It's a dashed shame," he amended. "I know it is; that's why I'm here. They're playing croquet on the back lawn—croquet!" Her voice expressed intense loathing for the gentle game.

"Sorry. Peccavi—that's Latin. They don't use Latin at sea much, do they? At least, they didn't when I was in sail." The assured air of the speaker, the phrase, so common at sea "when I was in sail," appealed irresistibly to the young sailor. He turned his handsome face upwards, and approached the tree a little closer.

"Call it Pax," he said. "But what on earth do you mean by talking about when you were in sail?"

"I was. Ten years. I say, I'm sorry I called you 'Binnacle boy.' It was the new cap. I thought you were a first voyager. I see now, though; you've been round the Horn, haven't you?"

"Three times—twice down the Easting, too. Only got home last week, and a sea washed out the half-deck, so I had to get a new rig-out. That's why I'm wearing the cap, you see."

"Yes, I see. I am sorry. What ship?"

"The Albemarle, four-master."

"Oh, steel, is she? In the nitrate trade, I suppose?" This with all the disgust of an old-time salt who has served in composite ships for modern creations.

"Yes, but she's a clipper, and as dry as a bone, too, except when she's running. Then she's rather a beast."

"Sh!" Aileen's voice suddenly lowered itself. "Come back in ten minutes, will you? They're in the front garden now. I'm going higher up. They can see me from the windows down here."

Leigh stood where he was until the rustling in the upper branches of the great chestnut had died away, then he walked on slowly. This meeting promised to have interesting results. Personally, he hated women, but the face of the girl, her understanding of the sea, and her cheerful bonhomie had pleased the lad considerably. The girl knew, his sister's chums,

made a little god of him, what of his voyaging, his picturesque uniform, and that intangible atmosphere of romance which surrounds a sailor. More than one gushing damsel had deliberately striven to kiss him behind the privet hedge, and only by exercising great tact and diplomacy had Leigh managed to escape the proffered and much-loathed salute.

He stopped as he reached a small gate in the wall, and read on an imposing brass plate the legend: "Misses Learoyd. Select Establishment for Daughters of Gentlemen."

"Boarding school," he ruminated. "Poor kid. She won't have a very brisk time of it there. Wonder who she is, though? I say, this is going to be a lark, and no mistake."

He walked on, still thinking hard. A girl—she could not be more than seventeen, he calculated, judging by his own sisters—who could boast of ten years at sea! Slowly revolving the problem, he reached the town, purchased a box of cigarettes—his sisters objected to a pipe in the streets—and went back faster than he had come.

"I believe I know who you are," he said, looking up at the branches. For a moment there was no answer, then the rustling recommenced, and Aileen's face showed.

"It's all clear now," she said. "They're at tea. I'm on bread and water to-day, so they won't bother me. Miss Selina came up just after you'd gone, and asked me if I'd repented. I'd gone back to my room, and so I heard her. If I'd repented she'd have forgiven me—she can't bear malice—so I said I was as hard as a Matthew Walker knot, and she went away. You see," she explained naively, "I wanted to get up here again."

"You're called Curzon, aren't you?"

"How do you know?"

"From what you said about being ten years in sail. Our old ship-keeper—Rhys, they call him—told me about you one night in the galley. He was aboard some ship or other—some old-fashioned tub about a century old, you know—what's wrong? There had come a defiant snort, and a huge chestnut struck him full on the upturned nose.

"Don't go calling my old ship names, you—you—steamship sailor! She's the best ship that ever flew the

Red Ensign. You ought to be ashamed of yourself." The rustling was repeated; Aileen was evidently retreating.

"I'll tell Miss Selina that I've repented," she said half tearfully. "I didn't think a sailor could be so—so beastly. I believe you're a Dutchman, and only dressed up."

"I say, I'm awfully sorry. Honest injun. But—I believe you are the Curzon girl, aren't you?"

"Yes." The answer was one quarter-repenting, but the quaver in her voice

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told that his slur upon the Zoroaster had hit hard.

"Do you say you know old Rhys?" Aileen was thawing rapidly now. To mention the name of one of her old shipmates was to tender an "Open Sesame" to her regard.

"Yes, rather. Jolly old boy, too. He's left the sea, though, because the rheumatism was so bad. Acts as a ship-keeper in the docks—but you'll know that, of course."

"Yes, I know it. My dad told me last time he was home."

"The Zoroaster's spoken off Dungeness this morning," said Leigh, with a desire to ingratiate himself still further.

"Is she? Hurrah! I'll see my dad the day after to-morrow, if this breeze holds. It's a fair wind up Channel."

"Our skipper—Vigors, they call him—told me something about you, too." Leigh was progressing fast. He waited for an answer, but received none in words. There was a grating, scramble, however, and a long arm shot down from the lowest branch. The hand was slightly sunburned at the back, the palm was excoriated.

"These beastly trees are the mischief," explained Aileen. "They simply skin you. Not like ropes. I say, will you shake hands?" Leigh gripped the proffered fingers, standing on tiptoe to do so.

"Awfully pleased to meet you," he said politely. "My name's Leigh—Morton Leigh."

"You know old Vigors and you know old Rhys, that's all I care about," said Aileen. "I don't know Vigors very well, but he was one of the ones, you know. There were ever so many of them—Fraser and Steady and Simms—only Simms is dead—and those I don't remember personally my dad and Steady told me about. Vigors was second mate when I was born."

"But what is it all about?" asked Leigh, after the introduction was formed completed. "This disgrace, I mean?"

"Oh, that's easy enough. It's like this, you see. I can't be good in fine weather. Yesterday was a flat calm don't you remember, and so—when Miss Selina had bored me sufficiently with a full and true account of her descent from the Bastille, or her great-grandmother's descent from the Tull-

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GEORGE KNOWLING.

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ries, or something of the sort—I up and told her that I didn't think those French aristocrats were up to much for letting their king get killed. I said that if he'd had half a dozen British merchantmen behind him they'd have kept his head on his shoulders; and she got wrothy—naturally enough. That's why. I feel quite good to-day, now it's freshening up for a blow. You understand the weather, don't you?"

"Yes, just a bit. That mackerel sky with the mares' tails means weather, and lots of it. But tell me something else about yourself."

"Oh, there's nothing to tell, and dad's coming home!" The voice rose in a lifting chant, strangely suggestive of the brisk beginning of a breeze. In her joy Aileen forgot her caution. Alas! for her new-born hopes.

"Miss Curzon! What disgraceful conduct; unseemly, abominable! Come down out of that tree immediately. Ladies never climb—"

"That's Miss Selina," hissed Aileen. "She's got me. Oh, bread and water, bread and water! You haven't got a bit of real ship's biscuit about you, have you?"

Leigh had. It was in process of transit to a young and enthusiastic cousin, who was fired with a desire to follow the sea. Leigh intended to show him the solid thing, as hard as a brick and as tasteless, as a dreadful warning. The "panicle" changed hands instantly. Aileen crowed her thanks and disappeared, a shrill remonstrance following her departure.

"This is something quite out of the ordinary," ruminated Leigh.

CHAPTER X.

The Call of the Sea.

Aileen thoughtfully broke off a square inch of the ship's biscuit and tried her teeth on it tentatively.

"Brick-dust, bone-dust, and water," she said. "I know. It's homelike to taste it." She nibbled away ecstatically, ignoring the plate of dry white bread that stood on a small table beside her chair. She was doomed to solitary confinement for two days, and she would appear before her father with the stigma of punishment fresh upon her. Unwonted hot tears started unbidden to her eyes, but they were not entirely born of remorse. The dry biscuit had brought old memories back to her, memories of the Zoroaster's fore-castle, with its row of gaudy-sea-chests, and its lines of swinging oilskins, distended from much wearing until they appeared to bear the semblance of decapitated seamen hanging for their sins.

(To be continued)

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