

The Girl Diver of the Great Lakes

By J. Olivier Curwood

Brains and Pluck and an Inherited Passion for Diving
Have Won Reputation and a Snug Fortune
for the Only Woman Engaged
in This Unusual Profession



FRANCIS BAKER, well educated and only twenty years of age. Miss Frances Baker, of Detroit, has won the reputation of being one of the most fearless and resourceful divers along the Great Lakes, and within the last three years has accumulated almost twenty-five thousand dollars in a profession that heretofore only the most courageous and physically perfect of men have dared to follow. The story of this girl's success, of her thrilling adventures and discovery of treasure reads almost like a chapter in an exciting book of fiction, and the elements of a

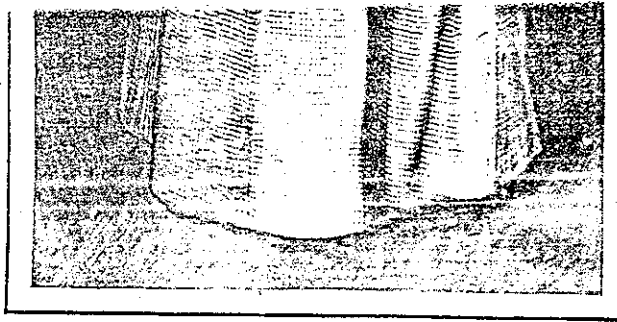
ladder and without a moment's hesitation disappeared under the surface of the lake. That first plunge into the new and fascinating world of the under sea left a vivid impression in the young girl's brain. It seemed at first as though some great creature with a thousand arms was pressing her gently but firmly on all sides, and for a few moments her breath came in short gasps, and a feeling of suffocation oppressed her. But the girl who was soon to become the most famous young woman on the Lakes was far from frightened. Steadily she

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From Duluth to Buffalo this courageous Michigan girl is now known as the Girl Diver of the Great Lakes, and wherever she goes she is regarded as the especial protégé of the lake seamen. Miss Baker's love for the wild and dangerous life of the diver is inherent. For a father she has the greatest captain of divers that ever worked in the big inland seas, a man who was never known to fail, and to whom the first alarm-calls usually come when ships need aid in Lake Erie and Lake Huron. But it is doubtful if even this great man of the Lakes, Capt. H. W. Baker, has had more thrilling or romantic experiences than his daughter.

From the time she was old enough to go down to the river alone, little Fannie used to watch Captain Baker's wrecking-ship leave on its adventurous missions with longing eyes. The ambition to become a diver matured in her day by day, and as she grew older she deplored the fate that had condemned her to be a girl. But when she saw that women were becoming lawyers, architects, bankers, and even engineers, her determination to become a diver was fixed. She began making wrecking-trips with her father, and soon became an almost inseparable companion to him. She studied every part of the machinery connected in any way with diving, and in time learned to command the wrecking-boat with a skill and assurance that was astonishing.

In Lake Huron a ship had gone down, a big wooden barge from the North, and it lay deep in sand fifty feet below the surface of the lake. On the wrecking-ship that went to raise it was one of the owners of the vessel, who had been on the barge when she sank. One day, before the wrecker reached the scene of operations, this man stood talking with Miss Baker.



Miss Frances Baker, of Detroit, Michigan, a Fearless and Successful Diver

"There is one article in that boat which I would like to secure," he said to her. "There is a diamond ring in my cabin that I prize very highly. I wonder if your father would get it for me?"

"I'll get it for you myself!" cried the young girl, impulsively.

For some time Miss Baker had been planning to make her first descent, and the following morning she prepared to go down with one of the old divers who was to be sent to inspect the ship. Her own father manned the compressed-air apparatus which meant life or death to her as she calmly walked down the ship's



The Girl Diver and a Companion Descending the Ladder. Miss Baker is the First Figure

stair plunge into the new and fascinating world of the under sea left a vivid impression in the young girl's brain. It seemed at first as though some great creature with a thousand arms was pressing her gently but firmly on all sides, and for a few moments her breath came in short gasps, and a feeling of suffocation oppressed her. But the girl who was soon to become the most famous young woman on the Lakes was far from frightened. Steadily she lowered one weighted foot after the other down the ladder, until she stood upon the bottom of the lake, with the shadow of the sunken barge looming up before her a dozen yards away.

At this depth the twenty pounds of lead attached to her feet seemed no heavier than ordinary soles of leather, and with a strange feeling of buoyancy she followed her companion to the walls of the sunken ship, and with his aid clambered up over them. At this point the plucky girl began to experience severe pains in her head, and she feared that her nose had begun to bleed. Undaunted still, she reached the cabin of the barge, and there laid a detaining hand on her guide's arm, signifying that she intended to enter first. Inside the cabin the electric-light the girl carried at her belt lit up the scene with weird distinctness. The discomfort caused by the pressure of the water and breathing compressed air had now become almost overpowering, and Miss Baker lost not a moment in her search. In one corner of the cabin she saw the stand described to her by

the owner, and on it the small box that contained the ring. In her haste to reach it she stumbled and fell, and for one moment a thrill of fear passed through her. But it was gone as quickly as it came, and with the box in her hand the girl returned to the deck of the barge, clambered over its sides again, and a couple of minutes later stood trembling and exhausted on the deck of the wrecker, the proudest and the bravest girl that ever set her foot on a ship of the inland seas.

As a reward for this daring exploit Miss Baker was presented with the diamond ring she had rescued, and it is now in her possession. That ring marked the beginning of her fame and fortune. The girl had proved that she could live in the under sea, and to be able to do this means that a person is worth anywhere from fifty to two hundred dollars a day to a wrecking company. Ninety-nine out of every hundred men who descend fifty feet under the cold waters of Lake Erie or Lake Huron will in a few minutes begin to suffer with bleeding at the nose, which is quick death if they stay, or with

head-splitting pains and suffocation. That is why all the good divers, from one end of the Lakes to the other, may be counted on one's fingers and toes.

Miss Baker now began following up her first adventure with practical work. The girl early developed the fact that she was fitted to be a captain of divers, instead of being a diver alone. Her plans for raising sunken ships and cargoes were daring, original and showed remarkable genius. Her suggestions were such as those which recently brought about the discovery of the treasure-ship *H. H. Stevens*, which added five thousand dollars to her rapidly growing fortune.

It was not long after this that she had a gruesome adventure which was enough to shatter the nerves of a less courageous young woman. A schooner went down in Lake Huron, but its entire crew escaped with the exception of one seaman. Before the raising of the vessel was undertaken, divers made a search for the body of this man. One after another several of them descended, but failed to find the missing sailor. Then Miss Baker volunteered to take a turn.

Like the others, she failed in the first part of the search. Then she descended into the hold of the vessel. The light she carried illumined the empty space for many yards ahead of her, but it disclosed nothing that might be the body of the seaman. From stern to bow she continued her hunt. Confident now that the sailor had been swept into the lake, she turned toward the open hatch. As she almost reached it, and lifted her eyes, the white glare of her light revealed a horrible sight. Floating between two of the deck-beams, with its face staring down and its arms reach-

As quick as a flash another of the boards above had caught the tube before it slipped over the side, and had attached it again just in the nick of time.

It was not long after this that the adventurous girl became entangled in the wreckage of a sunken boat, and for twenty minutes worked furiously fifty feet beneath the surface of the sea getting her guide-rope free enough to signal for help.

But all of these thrilling experiences only served

Now came the month when the *H. H. Stevens* was raised, and which brought her a check for five thousand dollars for ten days' labor.

Three years and more ago a "copper-ship" left the rich mining country of northern Michigan for Buffalo with fifty thousand dollars' worth of the red metal in her hold. She passed safely down Lake Huron through Saint Clair, and into the Detroit River. In Lake Erie she caught fire. The boats of the doomed vessel came in with her crew, and a that night the sea grew heavier and heavier, and the wind blew a gale. And when it was found that the treasure-ship was not drifting a derelict, no man could say where she had gone down.

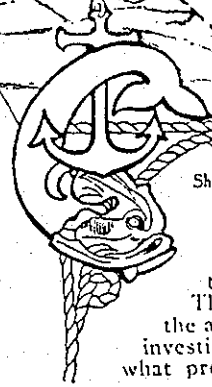
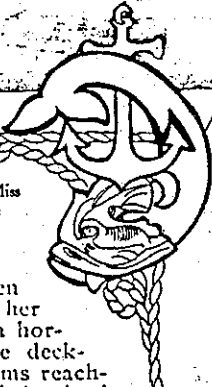
For many months fruitless searches were made for her. The insurance companies began first, and gave it up. It was reasoned that she might have drifted fifty miles before she went to the bottom, and that was a hopeless task to attempt to locate her. As months and years passed, the owners of the cargo offered half of it to any man or company who would solve the mystery of its resting-place. Then she started the great Lake Erie hunt for treasure. Wrecking companies, sea-captains in their own vessels, and men from Buffalo, Cleveland and Detroit joined that search for the ship-load of copper. But it failed. The *H. H. Stevens* had seemingly disappeared as completely as the bottom of the lake had opened

to receive her when she went down. The mystery of the copper-ship appealed to the adventurous girl diver. For many months she investigated the details of the fire, and knew just what progress that fire had made when the *H. H. Stevens*



The Finishing-Touch to Miss Baker's Diving-Costume

She is About to Begin Work on the Sunken Steamer *Berlin*



seaman. She continued her hunt. Confident now that the sailor had been swept into the lake, she turned toward the open hatch. As she almost reached it, and lifted her eyes, the white glare of her light revealed a horrible sight. Floating between two of the deck-beams, with its face staring down and its arms reaching out as if to clutch her, was the body of the dead sailor, almost directly above her head. So terrible did it look, with its arms and legs moving slightly and its face so dead-white, that the girl almost fainted. But knowing that her life depended upon her reaching the deck, Miss Baker clambered up, and giving the "haul-up" signal on her rope, was quickly pulled to the surface.

There came a time, however, when Miss Baker was placed for a few short moments in a more thrilling position than this. When a diver goes down, the air which he breathes comes into his helmet through a long rubber tube connected to the compressed-air apparatus on the deck of the wrecker. The moment this "thread of life" is broken the diver begins to suffocate, and unless he is instantly brought to the surface, or the working of the tube is resumed, he meets a frightful end. Miss Baker was once working along the side of a sunken ship, when she suffered the awful experience of having her air-supply cut off. She was half leaning over, examining some part of the boat, when it seemed as if a great hand had been suddenly clapped over her mouth. In an instant she knew what had happened, and even while suffocating, through the medium of her rope she sent up that mute but thrilling cry, which to every diver is "Help! Help! Help!" There was a moment when she would fall back in a death-clamp, and under sea, the fresh air began pouring into her lungs again. When Miss Baker reached the surface she found that one of the men had stumbled over the air-tube, knocking it from the compressed-air machine,

The Finishing-Touch to Miss Baker's Diving-Costume



She is About to Begin Work on the Sunken Steamer Berlin

to receive her when she went down. The mystery of the copper-ship appealed to the adventurous girl diver. For many months she investigated the details of the fire, and knew just what progress that fire had made when the *W. H. Stevens* was left to her fate that stormy night on Lake Erie. She figured the direction in which the gale was blowing, and long hours at a time the girl would imagine herself on the doomed copper-ship, slowly drifting with the storm. And each time she would stop off Point Burwell, and say, "Here is where we went down!"

With that point as a center, Miss Baker mapped out a square several miles long on each side.

"If we drag that square," she said, "just as a farmer would plow his field, we will find the copper-ship."

Last summer the Baker wrecking-ship set out on its romantic quest. On the outer edge of that part of the sea mapped out her drag-nets were dropped, and then and for several days the wrecker plowed slowly back and forth, as the captain's daughter had said it should. Nearer and nearer the center that spot "where the girl and her copper-ship had gone down," the low, black ship of the wreckers came. And when it had come within half a mile of it, early one morning the nets caught, and a shudder passed through the ship as she was brought to a stop.

"I believe it's the copper-ship," said Miss Baker, and the girl prepared to go down first.

Soundings showed that whatever had caught the nets was under eighty feet of water, a depth sufficient to test the physique of the most powerful divers. But Miss Baker allowed herself to be lowered, and no sooner had she reached bottom than with a thrill of joy she recognized the timbers of a burned ship. For ten days the wreckers worked hoisting the treasure, and when the copper was brought into port and sold, Miss Baker's share came to five thousand dollars.



Miss Baker Making Her First Descent as a Diver

to strengthen Miss Baker's intuition for her profession. She loved to know that at times her life depended upon her own skill and nerve, and after that she longed to see the wreck again. Within two years, after Miss Baker made her first descent in Lake Huron she possessed a handsome brick mansion all her own on one of the most fashionable streets in Detroit.