

THE UNION JACK

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JACK

THE "UNION JACK"
CONTAINS
A LONG, COMPLETE NOVEL
EVERY FRIDAY.

Convict 333



A grim smile crossed Captain Cleveland's face. He slid his hand into the drawer of a cabinet, and when it came out again it clutched a six-chambered revolver. "Step out, please!" he said, levelling the revolver. A man, in obedience to the order, scrambled out of the bunk, and stood before him.

No. 399

Convict 33

Specially written for the "UNION JACK" by CHARLES HAMILTON

CHAPTER 1.

How "Convict 33" Came Aboard the "Aurora"—The Passengers—A Startling Meeting.

There was fog upon the Bristol Channel, and some of it had penetrated into the interior of the ship "Aurora"; and Captain Cleveland, as he entered his cosy cabin, said very emphatically:

"Hang the fog!"

"Pretty thick in the town, sir, ain't it?" remarked the steward. "Something warmish to drink, sir? Werry good."

Captain Cleveland sat down, and shoved his boots almost into the glowing stove.

"Gillot," said he, "you're to prepare three staterooms, and see that No. 1 is made pretty decent for the young lady. We sail to-morrow morning, fog or no fog."

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good, sir," pursued the talkative steward. "I dessey, sir, that No. 33 will bless the fog to-night."

"No. 33! What do you mean?"

"The convict, sir. Don't you know the police have tracked him to Cardiff? It's a whole month since he escaped from Portland, and they haven't got him yet. He was seen by a policeman in Cardiff last night; but he got away, owing to the fog, and they haven't spotted him since."

A shade came over the fine face of Captain Cleveland.

"Thanks. You may take away the bottle. Good-night!"

The abruptness of the captain's manner surprised Gillot, but he only said "Good-night," and left the cabin, carefully closing the door after him.

Captain Cleveland sipped his hot grog, while he stared gloomily at the red coals in the stove.

"No. 33!" he muttered aloud.

"That's all that Gerald Clare has become—a number! Clare, my old friend and messmate, a convict! Ah, if only I could have found him in Cardiff to-night! But how could I expect to do so when there are a hundred police seeking him in vain? Hallo! Who's there?"

The captain's startled cry was caused by the sound of a person stirring in his own bunk.

At once he surmised that a dock-thief had come aboard in the fog, and hidden himself in the bunk as soon as he heard footsteps.

A grim smile crossed Captain Cleveland's face. He slid his hand into the drawer of a cabinet, and when it came out again it clutched a six-chambered revolver.

"Step out, please!" he said, levelling the revolver.

A man, in obedience to the order, scrambled out of the bunk, and stood before him.

The lamplight streaming upon him showed a young man, whose slouching gait and white, scared face told of suffering and servitude. His features were handsome, but thin, white, emaciated. Dark circles were about the eyes, the cheeks were hollow, the corners of the mouth drooping.

Captain Cleveland's hand slowly dropped to his side, and his gaze, fixed upon the stranger, expressed the most profound astonishment.

"Gerald Clare!" he cried.

The pale lips seemed to writhe in a bitter smile.

"No. 33, you should say," replied the young man.

Captain Cleveland thrust the pistol into his pocket, and stretched out his hand.

"I am glad to see you, Clare!"

But Gerald Clare did not touch his hand.

"Do you offer your hand to Convict 33?" he said.

"To Gerald Clare, my friend."

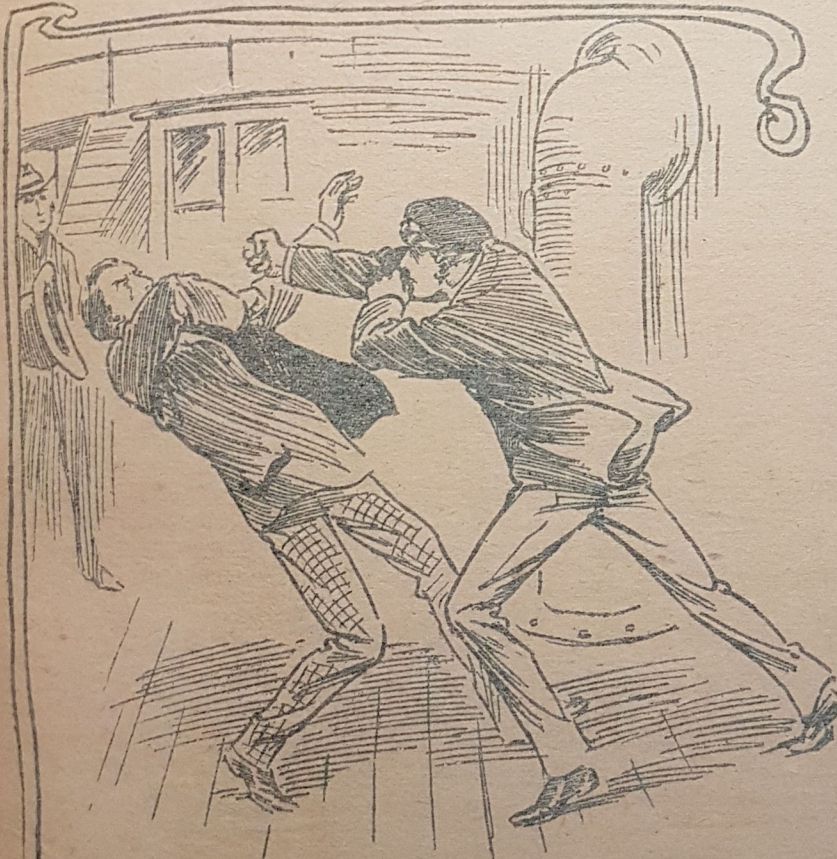
"You call me friend still?"

"Always."

"Then you believe me innocent?"

Captain Cleveland hesitated.

"I do not know what to believe," he said slowly. "If you were innocent, why did you not make an effort to save yourself? But at the trial you seemed to abandon hope, and



"Captain Cleveland, there stands Clare, the convict. I call upon you to clap irons upon the rascal."

The words were barely out of his mouth when he measured his length upon the deck, stretched there by a single blow from Clare's powerful arm.

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everyone said you were confounded by your exposure, and had not the hardihood to deny your guilt."

"Everyone—including yourself?"

"No; I will never believe you guilty unless you confess it. Yet I cannot wholly be satisfied that you were innocent, when you let everything go against you so recklessly." Then, deeply touched by the pain in the haggard face before him, Robert Cleveland cried: "Give me your word of honour that you were innocent, and I will believe you."

"I give you my word of honour!" slowly and steadily said Gerald Clare.

Captain Cleveland held out his hand again, and this time the convict gripped it. There were tears in the sunken eyes.

"Heaven bless you, Cleveland!" Clare said brokenly. "By the words which I overheard you utter just now I gather that you have been seeking me in Cardiff."

"It is true. I had a wild hope of meeting you and bringing you to the 'Aurora.'"

"To sail with you?"

"Of course."

"You will run that risk for friendship's sake?"

"You did not think of the risk, Clare, when you saved me from the shark, off the Andamans, four years ago," the captain replied. "But how, in the name of wonder, came you aboard the 'Aurora'?"

"I stole down to the docks, in the hope of stowing myself away upon some outward-bound vessel. I learned from the talk of some dockers that this was the 'Aurora.' I came here, then, to throw myself upon your compassion."

"You did well, Clare. Thank Heaven you came! Here you are safe."

"It is possible that the police may search outgoing craft."

"In that case you will have to spend some hours inside a cask."

"That is nothing. For rather than return to chains and slavery I will die—yes, a thousand deaths!" the convict cried. "Ah, if I had known the grinding misery of a convict-prison I do not think that I could have—"

He paused abruptly.

Captain Cleveland looked at him with a curious glance.

"There is one theory that occurred to me, Clare," he observed quietly, "and that is, that in this terrible affair you were sacrificing yourself for another. Is that the truth?"

"I can tell you nothing."

"If it is the case, would not a disclosure of the facts save you now? Think!"

"Supposing that were the case, I should be bound in honour to keep silent."

There came a tap at the cabin door, and it was opened immediately. The steward bustled in.

"If you please, sir, the second state-room—"

Then he stopped, dumbfounded at sight of the stranger. Clare had rid himself of his prison garb by despoiling a scarecrow, and had added to his raiment various rags he had come upon in his wanderings, so that now he presented a wretched, woebegone appearance, such as might have excited the derision of a beggar.

To find such an object in Captain Cleveland's cabin was so amazing that Gillot stood with open mouth and eyes, staring alternately at the skipper and the ragged stranger.

A hunted look came into Clare's eyes. In his mind's eye he saw behind the steward the uniforms and bayonets of the prison-warders. His glance roved round the cabin in search of a weapon.

Captain Cleveland, though extremely annoyed by the unlucky discovery, acted with prompt decision.

"Come in, Gillot, and close the door."

The wondering steward did so.

That he would have to know the truth was clear, for in his face strong suspicion was written. How could he fail to connect this wretched-looking refugee with the fugitive for whom the police were scouring Cardiff?

"Gillot, this gentleman is Gerald Clare."

"Convict 33, sir?" stammered the steward.

"A convict, unfortunately, but innocent of the crime laid to his charge. I explain this in order that you may understand the motive of my present action. I am going to conceal Mr. Clare on board the 'Aurora,' and take him to sea when we sail."

The steward's jaw dropped.

"That's breaking the law, sir."

"And you have got to help me, and to keep strict silence about the matter afterwards. For your trouble you shall have twenty pounds. But, mind, if you utter an indiscreet word I will clap you in irons the next minute, and you shall make the voyage on biscuit and water, and get your discharge at the end of it."

This threat, delivered in stern tones, brought Mr. Gillot almost to his knees.

"Sir, I am at your orders," he said submissively.

"You may go, then."

And Gillot went, in his mental confusion quite forgetting the errand which had brought him to the cabin.

"This is not wholly an unfortunate occurrence, Clare," Cleveland remarked, "for if the police search the 'Aurora' I could not conceal you without the steward's knowledge."

Clare's eyes were restless.

"The fellow looks talkative," he said.

"I do not think he will talk, though, after what I said to him. So if no one else saw you coming upon the 'Aurora'—"

"I am almost sure that the fog covered me."

"Good! Now to get you something to eat; I know you must be famished; and then some improvement in the way of clothes."

And the skipper, with hospitable haste, began to supply the wants of his visitor.

"Heaven bless him!—Heaven bless him!" murmured Clare.

Busy men swarmed the decks of the "Aurora."

It was morning, and the fog had lifted a little.

The ship was about to connect with the tug which was to take her out into the estuary of the Severn.

The passengers for whom Captain Cleveland had prepared the staterooms had come aboard. Busy as he was, Captain Cleveland had time to devote himself a little to them, for the party consisted of extremely important people, from a skipper's point of view.

Mr. Davenport, a reserved and somewhat ascetic-looking man of fifty, was the senior partner in the firm which owned the "Aurora" and many other vessels. His companion, Rupert Selwyn, was his nephew. He had an interest of some kind in the firm, and was reputed to be very wealthy, and a hard, cold man of business, young as he was.

Davenport was accompanied by his daughter Edith, and her maid. For what reason Captain Cleveland was a little puzzled to make out.

The uncle and nephew might have business at Jamaica, and, naturally, they would prefer to go in one of their own ships. But why was Edith going? The skipper could not help feeling curious. But he was very glad of the young lady's presence. For Cleveland had a weak spot in his sailor's heart for sunny-haired, sunny-tempered Edith, whom he had as yet worshipped from afar. Kept together by the limited space of a ship, meeting daily, it would not be marvellous if the fair passenger came to look favourably upon a devoted skipper, still young, and not bad-looking. So poor Cleveland flattered himself.

Davenport and Selwyn went down to their staterooms as soon as they came aboard, glad to get out of the smoke, the fog, and the hubbub.

But Edith remained on deck. She was not new to the sea, but she had never sailed on a vessel larger than a yacht before, and she wanted to see the "Aurora" tugged out.

Captain Cleveland did the honours of his vessel with a sailor's bluff grace, and the word was passed for that the young lady was to hear no fo'c's'le language." This order, however, was scarcely necessary, for Jack Tar is, with all his rough ways, the most courteous of men towards the gentle sex.

The ugly little black tug was about to take the "Aurora" in tow, when an authoritative call came from the dock.

"What is wanted?" asked Captain Cleveland, his heart sinking at sight of the familiar blue coats of the police.

"We have orders to search your vessel," replied the inspector. "Please let us come aboard at once."

The wooden gangway was replaced, and the police hastily came on board the "Aurora."

"We are looking for an escaped convict," the inspector explained. "He has been followed to Cardiff, and was seen by a labourer lurking about the docks in the fog last night. It is likely that he has stowed himself away on board some vessel, and we want to take a look over the 'Aurora.'"

"Take as many looks as you like, so long as you don't make me lose the tide," Captain Cleveland answered. "There is no chance of your convict being here, as a watch was on deck all-night. But, certainly, I shall feel easier in mind if you take a look round. It would be a pretty fix to find oneself at sea with a desperate ruffian lurking down in the hold, perhaps with a knife or a revolver."

The inspector smiled.

"No. 33 wasn't that kind of a bird," he answered. "A quiet young fellow enough; nothing of the desperado about him. But he is wanted bad, and that's a fact. He was a sailor before he went to prison, and that's one reason we have for thinking he'll try to get to sea."

"Well, make your search. My men will assist you. But, as a favour, be as quick over it as you can."

The policemen were soon at work.



As Captain Cleveland stood, looking very thoughtful, he felt a touch upon his arm. Edith Davenport was beside him. He was surprised to see the expression of her face. The blue eyes were clouded, the fair brow troubled.

"Captain Cleveland, do you think the convict they are searching for is on board this vessel?"

Her voice was tremulous; she appeared to be deeply moved. "It is possible," Captain Cleveland answered, inwardly writhing at being compelled to tell half a lie.

"And if they find him they will take him back to that awful prison?"

"That is their duty."

"Ah! if he is here I hope they will not find him."

The skipper looked at her in amazement.

"Why do you say that, Miss Davenport?"

Edith coloured, and then became pale.

"I had a friend—a very dear friend, who—she faltered, but went on bravely—"who is now a convict, Captain Cleveland. He also was a sailor before his disgrace. Often I have thought of him, penned within the narrow walls of a prison—perhaps in chains—when he was accustomed to wide sea and boundless sky! Poor fellow! Poor fellow!"

"God bless your tender heart, Miss Edith!" said the skipper, and his stern, steady eyes were moist. "You speak like an angel. I can understand now your pity for the poor fellow the police are now searching for. But I can assure you that they will not find him aboard the 'Aurora.'"

Edith had spoken impulsively to the captain; faithful memories had moved her to do so. But a fear lest she had been too frank now filled her with confusion, and, with a blush, she inclined her head to Cleveland, and went below.

The police search was neither thorough nor lengthy. It could not, in fact, be thorough without moving the cargo; and that wasn't to be thought of. Just a cursory examination was made, and then the inspector, apologising for the trouble he had given, led his men away.

Glad was Captain Cleveland to see the last of them. With all haste he set the "Aurora" in motion. As soon as she was passing down the Bristol Channel in the wake of the grimy tug he went into the cuddy.

Gillot was there, looking a little scared.

"It's all right, sir," he whispered. "They never even looked at the casks."

"Release him at once—unseen, of course—and send him into my cabin."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Recollect, Gillot, that his name is Richard Ayrton."

"Richard Ayrton? Yes, sir."

Captain Cleveland went out. The steward removed a heap of saucepans and pots and other utensils from the top of a cask, the centre one of three, each marked "oil."

Then he tilted over the cask, and a man crawled out, and rose to his feet.

It was Gerald Clare; but very different in appearance to the miserable fugitive who had boarded the "Aurora" only a few hours since.

A square meal and a rest had put new life into him, and a suit of Captain Cleveland's clothes made him look every inch a sailor.

The sight and sound of the sea were as new wine to the convict. His form grew erect, his step elastic; there was colour in his cheek, and fire in his eye. The crouch and slink of No. 33 were gone. He was Gerald Clare again, and a free, bold, handsome British sailor.

"Captain Cleveland says you are to wait for him in his cabin, Mr. Ayrton," said Gillot.

"Very good. Thank you."

Clare passed into Cleveland's apartment. He was closing the door, when a sweet voice struck upon his ear, evidently in reply to some question.

"They were searching for a convict, papa. They thought he might be hidden on this vessel."

"And was he?"

The second voice was grim, and not very pleasant to hear.

"No. They had made a mistake."

Clare became deadly pale as he listened. Dewy drops were upon his marble-like forehead. His hands trembled.

"Edith's voice," he muttered.

He crept towards the stateroom passage. As it chanced, Edith was leaving it to go on deck. Clare met her face to face.

She did not glance at him, but his eyes devoured her beautiful features with a strange, wild tenderness.

"It is she!" murmured Clare.

The next moment Edith received a shock—nothing less than the sight of a man falling at her very feet in a dead faint.

The startled girl stood still, turning white; but she did not scream, as most women would have done.

"Papa! Mr. Selwyn! Please come here!"

The two men were out of their rooms very quickly, the younger man the quicker of the two.

Selwyn's face—rather handsome, in spite of its hard lines and cold, gray eyes—looked eager, as if he were very glad to hear his name called by Edith.

"What is the matter, Miss Davenport? How can I serve you?"

"Do you see this man? He fell down suddenly. I do not know why. Perhaps he is hurt."

"Drunk, more likely," laughed Selwyn; and he stooped over Clare. "I will attend to him, Miss Davenport."

Edith bowed, and passed on to the companion.

The steward came bustling out.

"Do you know who this is?" Selwyn asked. He had ascertained that Clare was unconscious.

"That's Mr. Ayrton, sir—Captain Cleveland's friend," the steward answered promptly.

"Friend—eh?" observed Mr. Davenport. "Isn't he belonging to the ship?"

"N-no, sir, not as I know of."

"H'm!" And the shipowner went back to his cabin, not at all concerned about the captain's friend, Mr. Ayrton.

Gillot and Selwyn carried Clare into the cabin of the skipper, and laid him upon the sofa.

"I'll look after him, sir," the steward said.

"What's the matter with him?"

"Looks like a faint. Weakness, I suppose."

"Not drink—eh?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

Selwyn left the cabin, dismissing the matter from his mind as no business of his.

"Wot the dooce did he faint for?" muttered the steward.

"Must have been fright at being seen. But he looked cool enough when I got him out of the caak, too. This is a rotten bad business. Cap'n Cleveland 'll git hisself inter trouble; and, wot's wuss, me, too."

In a few minutes Cleveland came in. From Edith he had learned what had happened. He sent Gillot back to his duties, and waited patiently beside Clare for the young man's recovery. Very soon Clare came to himself.

He looked wildly at Cleveland for a moment, and then, to the skipper's astonishment, buried his face in his hands.

"Why, what ails you, Clare?" exclaimed Cleveland, greatly distressed. "What is the meaning of this?"

Clare was silent for a full minute, the convulsive heaving of his breast alone showing how terrible was the effort he made to control himself. When at length he looked up, his face was calm, but white as a sheet.

"You did not tell me that you had passengers on the 'Aurora,' George," he said slowly.

"I think I mentioned that my owners were going to Jamaica in the 'Aurora,' did I not?"

"Ah, yes; but—"

"Mr. Davenport is senior partner; Selwyn is—I don't exactly know what."

"Mr. Davenport?" repeated Clare, in a faltering voice.

"Yes; his firm bought the 'Aurora' about a year ago."

"Joseph Davenport, of Bristol?"

"Yes. Do you know the man?" the captain asked, surprised by Clare's persistence.

Clare smiled in a grim way.

"Oh, yes, I have met him."

Captain Cleveland looked anxious.

"That is unfortunate. Do you think he is likely to recognise you, Clare?"

"Have I not changed?"

"Immensely."

"I think I can defy recognition, with ordinary care."

"But," continued the wondering captain, "was it the unexpected meeting with Miss Davenport, then, that caused your fainting?"

A flush of colour stole over Clare's face.

"It was a shock," he said evasively; "but don't fear. I shall have better command of my nerves in the future. What explanation will you give your owners of my presence here?"

"You are Richard Ayrton; you are going out to take an appointment at Port Royal, and you are going to act as third mate on the voyage out. I thought you'd like to have a taste of the tar again, after—" Cleveland hesitated.

"Thanks, thanks," Clare said gratefully.

"Do you think you can stand the ordeal of an introduction to Davenport?" asked Cleveland anxiously.

"Oh, yes, I am quite master of myself, now that I know what I have to go through."

"That's all right, then," Cleveland went back to his duties, numerous enough just then, and Clare remained alone. Unseen now, he ceased to guard his features; the mask of calmness dropped off, and the anguish that was tearing his heart quivered in his drawn face.

"Edith here," murmured he. "How I have longed and prayed for a sight of her face! And now we meet, and I dare not speak, dare not tell her my name, dare not touch her hand. What does she think of me? Would she spurn from

her the escaped convict, the man who has borne the brand of the broad arrow. Sweet and gentle she is—yet—a convict—a felon! He shuddered. Then his brow grew darker. "But, Davenport? Why is he leaving England? Is there some new villainy afoot?"

Captain Cleveland's thoughts, as he went up the companion were also far from pleasant.

For the discovery that Clara knew the Davenports gave a new meaning to why Edith had said to him when the police were searching the "Aurora" for Convict 33.

Could it be that Gerald Clare was the "friend" of whom she had spoken so tenderly and gratefully?

And Clara had not fainted for nothing. Did it mean that there had been friendship—or more than friendship—between the two?

Captain Cleveland felt a little chill at his honest heart. It was not a pleasant thought, that the friend to whom he had given shelter was his rival in love.

CHAPTER 2.

Out at Sea—Clare's Ordeal—An Accident in the Fog.

Down the Bristol Channel the "Aurora" went under full sail after the tug left her.

The fog was clearing off, and the seamen could see the cliffs of Devon on the south, and on the north the hills of Wales beyond the rugged coast.

Before them lay the Atlantic, the rolling waste of waters which was all they were to see for the next few weeks.

Clare did not appear on deck until the "Aurora" was passing Lundy Island, the last English soil to be seen.

Then Captain Cleveland presented him to the mates as "Mr. Ayrton," the new third mate for the voyage out.

The officers were naturally surprised, for they had not known of his presence on board; but it was explained that he had not been to sea for a considerable time, and that, feeling "queer," he had kept out of the bustle of putting to sea.

The chief mate, O'Brien, was a pleasant, ruddy Irishman; the second was a Cardiff man, named Evans. Both greeted Clare with cordiality and without suspicion.

It was joy to Clare to see the water heaving, the canvas filling, to hear the crackling of the cordage, the straining of the spars, and the cheery voices of the seamen.

The life he had left—the hideous convict garb, the tomb-like prison, the stolid warders with fixed bayonets—all this seemed to have fallen an immense distance behind him.

When he thought of it, it seemed impossible that he was the wretch who, a few weeks ago, had toiled with the quarry gang, with haggard face and seared, doubting heart.

"Oh, the beautiful, beautiful sea!" he exclaimed involuntarily, as, in a pause of work, he stood at the taffrail and gazed at the wide ocean stretching away to the Cornish coast.

The next instant he recollected himself, and turned to see if anyone had overheard his heart-spoken words—and he saw Edith Davenport looking at him with a curious, troubled expression in the depths of her sweet blue eyes.

She dropped her gaze at once; Clare, colouring like a boy, shouted an unnecessary order to cover his confusion.

He did not know what thoughts were in Edith's mind as she stood pensively looking at the sea.

"What is there about that man to chain my interest? Why does he seem familiar to me? He is a seaman. I have never seen him before. Why does his face seem to appeal to my memory?"

It was a question to which she could not find an answer. The dinner bell rang in the first dog-watch.

Mr. Davenport, Rupert Selwyn, the captain and "Mr. Ayrton," met at the cuddy dining-table, with, of course, Edith.

Clare preserved the most absolute composure while Captain Cleveland presented him to the passengers. He was aided by the indifference of Mr. Davenport, who was thinking only of his dinner, and the preoccupation of Selwyn, who was thinking of Edith. But the girl's eyes often unconsciously sought the pale, handsome face of Clare, and ever her glance was puzzled, as of one baffled by an enigma.

During dinner an unpleasant fact became very obvious to the jealous eyes of Cleveland and Clare. Rupert Selwyn's attentions to Edith were those of a suitor, but whether the girl allowed them or failed to observe them could not be seen.

Captain Cleveland, lately buoyed up with hope, felt himself sinking to despondency. Selwyn was rich, and evidently favoured by the father, and at least endured by Edith. Cleveland's chance began to look remote.

When Edith retired from the table, the talk ran on the subject of the police visit to the "Aurora." As Mr. Davenport and Selwyn had been below, they were curious to hear about it, and Captain Cleveland had to explain.

"Do you chance to know who the scoundrel is?" Mr. Davenport queried, and his eyes had a shifty look in them.

Captain Cleveland thoughtfully had a lapse of memory just

then; but unluckily Mr. O'Brien came down to dinner in time to hear the question of the shipowner. Davenport, who seemed curious upon the point, appealed to him when the captain's remembrance failed.

"No. 33 was what the inspector said," the chief mate answered at once.

"No. 33!" exclaimed Rupert Selwyn; "that's the convict whose escape from Portland made a sensation a month or so ago, isn't it?"

"That's the man. His name is Gerald Clare," said O'Brien. Mr. Davenport gave a start.

"Gerald Clare," he repeated slowly.

"Ah," said Selwyn, and he looked towards the shipowner.

"You know something of him, do you not?"

"I? What makes you think so?"

"You sailed in the 'Speranza,' the vessel of which Clare was captain. I have heard Miss Davenport speak of it."

"Oh, yes; I had almost forgotten it," said Davenport carelessly. "There was a sort of acquaintance between us, of course; but I really knew nothing of the man."

The subject was bitterly distasteful to the shipowner; but he thought it necessary to conceal that; and he did it so well that Selwyn, having no idea of his feelings, continued on the same tack.

"Still, you met and spoke with him. What was your opinion as to his innocence or guilt?"

"Really, I don't recall what he was charged with."

"That's curious; I remember reading the case with much interest," Selwyn went on blindly. "He made away with a sum of money from the strong-room of the 'Speranza'—a very large sum—and was fool enough to sail his ship home without it. I have always thought that, if guilty, he was the biggest fool on earth. For he could have sunk the 'Speranza' on a reef as easy as rolling off a log, and that would have covered his tracks completely. But to come home with the money missing, and without even a lie ready to account for it—"

"Proves," interrupted Captain Cleveland, "that he was innocent."

"Innocent!" cried Mr. Davenport, with a very disagreeable look. "If he was innocent, what became of the money?"

"Oh, somebody stole it, I admit."

"Then why did not Clare accuse that somebody?"

"My belief is that he was shielding that person!" decisively replied the skipper.

Edith, with her door ajar, heard all that was said at the dining-table in the cuddy. As the captain's words were spoken, a great light came into her face.

"Innocent! He believes Gerald innocent!" she breathed.

Cleveland's declaration brought an ugly sneer to the cold, hard face of Joseph Davenport.

"Ah, you think Don Quixote is not yet dead," he observed.

"Do you really believe one man would go to penal servitude in the place of another if he could help it?"

"I do not know what his motives might be."

"Very powerful ones, I should think," Selwyn said, laughing heartily. "I should consider such a man an imbecile."

Clare kept silence all this while.

But once or twice he glanced at Davenport from under his brows, and in his look were hatred and bitter disdain.

Captain Cleveland, to put an end to a discussion which he knew must be painful to his friend, rose.

"But why do you defend Clare, captain?" asked Selwyn.

"Was he a friend of yours?"

"The truest shipmate that ever walked a deck!" answered Cleveland warmly.

"And did you," continued the young man, in rather a mocking tone, "ever know him commit such an act of extravagant self-sacrifice?"

"He got me out of the very jaws of a shark once at the most terrible risk to himself. It seemed like certain death to one of us, and he chose it; it was by a miracle that he escaped death."

And Captain Cleveland left the cuddy, secretly exasperated by the sneer upon Mr. Davenport's face. Rupert Selwyn laughed lightly as he struck a match for his cigar.

"Our friend the captain seems quite enthusiastic," he drawled. "It is not everyone who would own a convict for a friend."

"Especially such a scoundrel as this Clare is known to be," remarked Joseph Davenport.

Clare's features twitched. He went hastily on deck, nearly mad with suppressed rage.

"Oh, the hound—the coward!" he inwardly cried. "If it were not for Edith— Ah, my darling, you little know what I bear for your sake!"

Evening was darkening upon the sea, and with night the fog grew thicker.

Captain Cleveland reluctantly had the topsails taken in, and then a reef in the mainsail and foresail.

"We shall have to crawl," O'Brien! he growled, sniffing the fog, and impatiently stamping his foot. "There's a regular

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stiffer coming from the Irish coast. We shall have it for days," the "Suro" remarked, and that's bad, too, in the narrow seas," the chief mate remarked.

"Yes; out in the Atlantic I wouldn't care. But here we shall cross the line of the craft coming up for Cork and St. George's Channel. However, with plenty of lights and a good look-out, I hope there'll be no accidents."

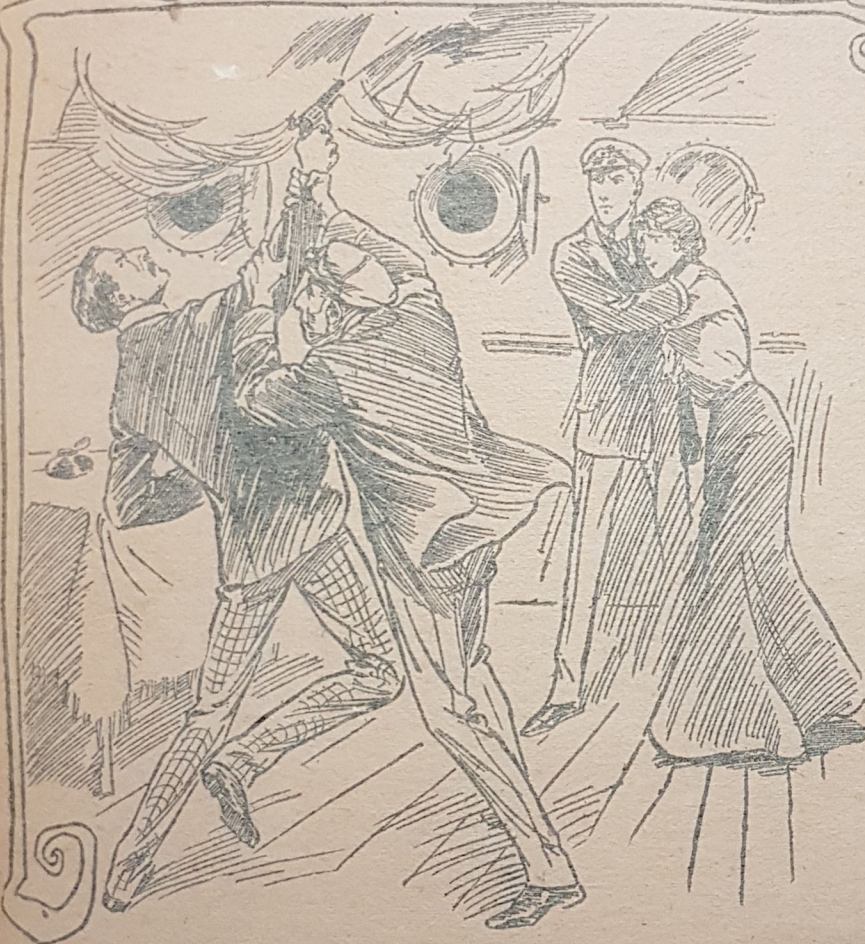
A fog at sea was a complete novelty to Edith, and, well protected by fur and sealskin against the cold, she passed more time on deck than in her cabin. Her maid, Browne, preferred the warmth of the cuddy, and the interesting gallantries of Mr. Galot, the steward.

On the ocean a fog is the most baffling of things to a sailor. A ship has to feel her way. Lights do not carry far through the soupy haze. Cleveland's fear of collisions was very well grounded. The keenest look-out was kept, and, had a ship loomed ahead, the "Aurora" could have given her a proper

The stately ship swept on.
 "It must have been a boat."
 "A fishing-smack, no doubt."
 "What cursed luck!"
 There was a run to the taffrail to glare back at the spot of the collision.

Edith, pale as death, leaned over the rail as far as she could in her eagerness to search the sea.
 Captain Cleveland was the most humane of skippers. Hopeless as seemed the prospect of saving anyone, he was determined to try, and he instantly rang out orders to round the ship to.

The active seamen obeyed promptly. But there was one unforeseen result of this evolution. The sea was heavy, and the "Aurora" began to roll; and Edith Davenport, unprepared for it, was only saved from being tossed bodily into the sea by a strong arm which was flung round her at the critical moment.



Her senses swam. When she was herself again she heard a voice saying, very close to her ear:

"Can you stand, do you think?"

Blushing, she withdrew herself from the arms of Gerald Clare.

"Yes, I thank you, Mr. Ayrton," she said tremulously. "Was I—was I in danger?"

"The ship rolled while you were leaning over the rail," Clare explained. "You came near being tossed overboard."

"And you saved me? Oh, thank you! I might have been down there now!" She shivered. "But—but we shall save the people we ran down, Mr. Ayrton!"

He shook his head sadly.

"I fear not, Miss Davenport."

"Who do you think they were?"

"A Cornish fishing-smack, I should think, making for Penzance. No doubt the poor fellows had lost their bearings in the fog, and had wandered out to sea; but they were heading landward when we ran into them."

"Poor, poor men! It is terrible!"

"Terrible indeed, but not uncommon on foggy seas. Captain Cleveland has nothing to reproach himself with. It was an accident that could not be foreseen. There is a fatality about these things," Clare said, with a shake of the head. "With the wide ocean on either side, what a wretched chance that two vessels should happen to meet upon the one spot where meeting means destruction. But you are unnerved now. Let me see you to your cabin, please. If any of the poor fellows are saved, I will inform you at once."

Edith allowed him to take her down, and it was natural that this occurrence, which had brought them near together for a short time, should make the mysterious Mr. Ayrton occupy her mind more than ever.

"He saved my life," Edith said to herself. "And what compassion his face expressed for those poor fishermen! He is a good and a brave man. How he reminds me of—"

She did not finish the reflection, but blushed and sighed. She was thinking of Gerald Clare.

Captain Cleveland spent an hour searching in a boat for the unfortunate victims of the collision. He hoped to find some survivor, clinging, perhaps, to the shattered smack. But the quest was in vain, and was at length given up.

Faces were gloomy on board the "Aurora" as she resumed her way. It was some time before the depressing influence of the catastrophe wore away.

A moment more and Clare, unprepared for such a murderous move, would have lain upon the planks with a bullet in his head or heart. But a man sprang upon Selwyn just in time; it was Captain Cleveland. In an iron grip, Selwyn's wrist was forced upwards, and thither flew the bullet.

birth. But a small craft on the sea could not hope to be discerned. And so occurred upon this dim night one of those grim little tragedies of which landsmen seldom hear anything, but which impress upon the seaman the peril of his calling and his constant nearness to death.

"Did you hear something?" suddenly exclaimed Gerald Clare, who was standing on the gangway.

Mr. O'Brien, who was near him, shook his head.

"What do you think you heard, Mr. Ayrton?"

"A call from the sea."

"Which way?"

"Dead ahead."

"There can't be—"

Before the chief mate finished speaking, a crash was heard under the bows, and a single sharp shriek rang weirdly through the fog.

"Good heavens, we have run them down!"

"£10,000 REWARD!" is the title of the Grand Complete Novel in next Friday's UNION JACK.

CHAPTER 3.

Selwyn Makes a Discovery—Edith Speaks Out—Breakers Ahead!—Gerald Clare.

The fog had haunted the "Aurora" for several days, but at length was shaken off, and the hearts of the voyagers were gladdened by sunshine on the sea.

The improvement in the weather made every heart lighter, excepting those weighed upon by secret cares. Among these latter was Gerald Clare's.

The sense of freedom, the security from pursuit, the old familiar sight and sound of the sea, had indeed made a new man of Clare; yet his very freedom was like to bring fresh tortures in its train. In the convict gang he had thought of Edith with hopeless yearning, and would have deemed a glimpse of her face happiness in itself. And now he saw her and spoke to her daily, and was as hopeless as ever; for he was forced to keep a distance, to choke back the words he longed to utter. Worst of all, he saw clearly as the days passed that Rupert Selwyn was not only a tutor, but considered himself practically a successful one. That there was any engagement between Selwyn and Edith Clare did not believe. But there was a certain confidence about the young man that was disquieting, exasperating, to a jealous rival.

Clare naturally took a dislike to Selwyn, though he was careful not to betray it. Selwyn's feeling towards him was one of perfect indifference. He paid no more attention to Clare than to O'Brien or Evans. If he noticed that the third mate was often telling Edith sea stories, or explaining nautical mysteries to her, he thought nothing of it.

But Selwyn wasn't in a satisfied frame of mind, all the same. Edith puzzled him. Without any definite change in her manner, he felt that she was further from him than she had been before they sailed in the "Aurora."

"She does not care for me," Selwyn said to himself. And his teeth came together with a click, and an extremely disagreeable expression came over his face. In his eyes was an indefinite threat. "I cannot hope that she does. But I have never been baffled yet, and I will not take my first defeat from a girl. She shall yield to me, and I will make her glad to do it. Have I not an ally in her respectable father?"

And the young man smiled with contempt.

This reflection passed through his mind in a moment of intense irritation, when Edith had coldly repelled an advance. It showed Selwyn's nature. To gain his point he was prepared to make use of any advantage he possessed. Young in years, he was old in craft and business experience, and such a thing as chivalry towards the weaker sex did not enter into his calculations.

His dissatisfaction did not escape Mr. Davenport, who spoke to him upon the subject. The shipowner, for his own reasons, was anxious for an engagement between the cousins.

"You do not seem to be making much progress with Edith, Rupert," he remarked.

"No," the young man replied disconsolately, "and I am beginning to suspect that you have not treated me fairly in this matter."

"My dear nephew—"

"Chuck that!" interrupted Selwyn. He was in an angry mood, and his politeness was seldom able to bear a great strain. "It's a matter of business between us. You want my money, and I want Edith. I am going to keep your rotten concern going if I become your son-in-law within a reasonable period. You told me," he went on, careless of Davenport's look of rage, "that Edith was heart-whole, that by wooing I should win. I have wooed. With what result? Nil! Then you suggested a sea-voyage. On a ship we should be thrown together, with no other society, and she would be bound to encourage me. I thought that a good idea. But what has it led to! Ever since we left Cardiff, Edith has been growing colder and colder to me. She's an iceberg now. Don't pretend to be surprised. You know it as well as I do."

"I cannot understand it," said Davenport.

"I believe I can," Selwyn answered grimly. "I think you tied to me when you said that Edith was heart-free. The only explanation of her attitude is that she has had a love-affair which she has not yet forgotten—perhaps never will forget."

"Impossible!" stammered Davenport.

Selwyn looked at him suspiciously.

"I believe that is the explanation," he persisted.

"You are entirely mistaken."

"I shall ask Edith myself."

Davenport looked startled.

"Do you mean that, Rupert?"

"Decidedly! I am not going to be played with. Ah, I see you have something to say now! What is it?"

"Possibly—probably—Edith had a momentary fancy for Gerald Clare, the captain of the 'Speranza'; but that was more than two years ago, and I am sure she has forgotten—"

"Clare—Clare the convict!"

"Yes."

"Why did you not tell me before!" snarled Selwyn, his

features twitching with jealous anger. "You thought it would endanger your chance of my money, eh?" he added brutally, seemingly taking a pleasure in taunting his uncle. "You are a fool! I would not give up Edith if she had loved every convict that wears the broad arrow! Then it is Clare, the thief and felon, who is the hero of her memory?"

Then a new idea, born of her memory, the alert mind of Rupert Selwyn,

"Ashore she was at least a friendly cousin to me; on board the 'Aurora' she has been ice. There is some reason for this difference. Has she seen Clare?"

"Seen Clare! Are you mad!" ejaculated Davenport.

"You know that Clare is no longer at Portland. You know he escaped, was tracked to Cardiff, was seen lurking in the docks the night before we sailed. You know the police suspected that he would attempt to escape to sea by concealing himself on board one of the outgoing vessels."

Davenport turned deadly pale.

"Do you mean, Selwyn, that he may be on board the 'Aurora'?"

"Why not?"

"The police searched for him before we sailed."

"Which shows that they considered it extremely probable that he was here."

"But their search would have unearthed him."

"Not if he were concealed with the captain's connivance."

"Captain Cleveland would never dare."

"Would he not? He has declared that he believes in the innocence of the scoundrel, who was his personal friend."

Clare, it seems, has saved his life upon some occasion. The most natural thing in the world would be for him to shelter an old shipmate, whom he regards as a victim of oppression."

Davenport could not help admitting that it looked reasonable.

"It is certain," Selwyn said vehemently, "Clare is hidden somewhere on board the 'Aurora,' and Edith has seen him, spoken with him. That accounts for everything."

"No, no!" cried Davenport. "Edith would never keep a secret of that kind from me."

Selwyn looked at him with disdain.

"You are the kind of parent to be confided in, of course. Don't talk to me. I know the truth. But tell me this: Was there anything spoken between Clare and Edith?"

"I believe so," Davenport said reluctantly.

"There was! With your consent?"

"In a way—yes."

"And you made her drop him when he stole the twenty thousand? Well, that was proper—though I shouldn't be surprised if you had a hand in that business, too!"

Selwyn turned away abruptly as he spoke, so he did not see the effect of his parting shot upon the elder man. Davenport's face, already pale, became nearly grey.

The uncle cast a venomous glance after the nephew.

"The overbearing, purse-proud puppy!" he hissed. "How I hate him! If it were not for his money—"

While the dutiful nephew murmured:

"The cowardly, lying, cringing scoundrel! How I despise him! If it were not for his daughter—"

It will be seen that there was neither love nor esteem lost between these two.

Rupert Selwyn was so disturbed by the information he had gained from the reluctant Davenport that he was not long in speaking to Edith upon the subject.

At sea passengers are hard put to it to kill time, and so Selwyn did not lack opportunities of speaking.

On fine days Edith was much on deck, with her camp-stool and books, and Selwyn generally attended her.

On the evening succeeding his supposed discovery, Selwyn and the girl were alone together. Edith had closed her book, and was looking dreamily at the sunset. Afar in the west the great golden ball was sinking to the horizon, fringing the white clouds with gilded gleams. But Rupert had no eyes for the scene, beautiful as it was. He was thinking of Edith, and of his suspicion that Clare was hidden aboard the "Aurora."

"Our voyage is half over, cousin," he said abruptly. "Will you be sorry to leave the 'Aurora'?"

"Very," Edith said, with a sigh. The sigh fanned the flame of Selwyn's jealousy.

"Edith, I asked you a question once, to which you replied with a 'No.' If I repeated it—"

"My answer would be the same now, so please do not repeat it," she said. "Let us talk of something else."

"Wait a little. I have something to say. Edith, I love you, and you cannot say that I have not proved my devotion. Don't you think you could ever take pity on me?"

"Never, in that way. I could not. Don't ask me!" And Edith coloured consciously.

"You have a reason for being so resolute?"

"Certainly!" She spoke sharply, for his tone annoyed her.

"Will you favour me with the reason?"

"You have no right to ask it. Surely it is enough for you to know that I cannot be your wife? But, if you must be satisfied, my reason is that I do not even like you. You are not a man I could trust, much less love. There is not the slightest chance of my opinion altering."

This was unusual plain-speaking for the gentle-hearted Edith; but it was provoked by Selwyn's look, half a threat and half a sneer, which roused all the antagonism in her nature.

She had long suspected that Selwyn had some underhand influence over her father, and strongly resented it, and also the proprietorship he sometimes, in his arrogance, assumed towards herself. But Mr. Davenport had told her frankly that he dared not quarrel with Selwyn, and for his sake she bore an odious situation patiently, appearing to observe nothing. But, naturally, her private opinion of Selwyn was not improved by all this.

Her words had no effect upon Selwyn, excepting to intensify the unpleasant sneer upon his face. He expected a refusal, and he did not care if he made Edith angry, for he felt certain of gaining his point in the long run.

"No, I cannot expect you to like me," he said, in a tone of satirical humility; "I have never worn the broad-arrow suit!"

She looked at him, white and startled.

"What do you mean?" she breathed.

"I know that Gerald Clare is on board the 'Aurora,'" replied Selwyn, looking her fixedly in the eyes.

Edith gave a low, stifled cry, and leaned back weakly in her chair.

"Gerald Clare!" she murmured.

"Clare, the thief! Clare, the felon! Clare, the convict!" Selwyn repeated, with cruel enjoyment.

Her eyes flashed; in a moment she was herself again.

"How dare you?" she panted. "Coward—coward!"

"Control yourself, Edith," he said coldly. "You will attract attention to us. Mr. Ayrton has been looking at us for several minutes already."

Edith shot him a swift glance he did not understand. There were expressed in it surprise, relief, even amusement. He was thoroughly puzzled.

"So you think Gerald Clare is aboard this vessel?" she asked composedly.

"I am sure of it," he said, with conviction. "Captain Cleveland sheltered him for old times' sake."

"Even so, what would you do?"

Selwyn's brow grew blackly sombre.

"Can you ask? He is a convict. I will find him, and denounce him! In spite of Captain Cleveland, he shall finish the voyage in irons. Jamaica is British territory. When we arrive there he shall be handed over to the police. They will send him back to Portland."

"And why should you act like this towards a man who has never offended you?"

"Because he is my rival. But I am willing to let him escape upon one condition—that you are my betrothed wife from this day, and that our marriage takes place in Port Royal."

Edith rose, and fixed upon Selwyn a look which made even him feel uncomfortable.

"I never liked you, Rupert Selwyn," she said slowly.

"Lately I have grown to dislike you. Now I despise you—I detest you! Marry you!" She laughed, with bitter contempt. "I would rather—a thousand times rather—marry the roughest and lowest of yonder sailors—ay, or a beggar in the street!"

Selwyn writhed under the stinging lash of her words. It was a full minute before he could control himself sufficiently to answer calmly.

"I have never allowed anyone to foil me; you shall not be the first to do it. You shall marry me. If I hated you with my whole soul you should not escape me now. As for your gael-bird lover, he shall go back to the quarries, and rot in chains!"

And he left her, his very heart quivering with suppressed fury. Whatever happened now, Rupert Selwyn was implacable. His self-love was too cruelly wounded for forgiveness.

For the unknown Clare he felt the most intense hatred. To be spurned for the sake of an escaped convict—there was the sting! Well, Edith should see her felon lover sent back to his servitude; that was the price she should pay for her preference.

Joseph Davenport looked up nervously as his nephew entered his stateroom. Selwyn's drawn brows were not calculated to reassure him.

"What is the matter, Rupert?"

"I have spoken to Edith."

"Well?"—uneasily.

"I know now for certain that she still loves Clare. She has refused me point-blank. Moreover, she knows that Clare

is on board. When I said so, she was dismayed, but not surprised. The next thing is to find him."

"But if we find him—what then?"

"Captain Cleveland is under your orders, as you are his owner. He will not dare refuse to clap the scoundrel in irons, to be delivered over to the police at Port Royal. That is what you must insist upon."

"But—but—" stammered Davenport, betraying a disquietude which Selwyn could not understand. "But—"

"But what? Don't pretend to feel pity for Clare. Do you think you can deceive me? You have never allowed a conscientious scruple to stand in your way. Are you afraid of Clare, for some reason? Ah!" cried Selwyn, watching the other's expression, "that's it, is it?"

"Nonsense! Why should I be afraid of him?" said Davenport, shrinking from Selwyn's searching gaze. "Still, I—"

"Davenport, if you fail me now you are sufficiently in my power for me to take a terrible revenge. Don't expect pity from me. Clare shall go back to prison, and Edith shall be my wife, and in every move I make for these purposes you have got to lend me your aid. Do you understand?"

Davenport ground his teeth. He was finding out his nephew's true nature at last. He had dreamed of twisting the young man round his finger, confident in his own cunning. Instead of that, he found in Selwyn a master with an iron hand.

"You fear Clare for some reason," resumed Selwyn; "but I think you have cause to fear me more. Your speculations have ruined you. Only my money has kept you from bankruptcy. I could sell you up to-morrow, if I chose, were we on land. Did you think me blind to your second motive for making this voyage? If you could not marry Edith to me, you wanted to be out of England when the crash came. From Jamaica to the Argentine is an easy step. I could read you like an open book. I will see that you leave Jamaica in charge of detectives, if you fail me in this matter."

Davenport was perfectly livid with rage. Gladly he could have struck Selwyn dead at his feet. But he was paying the penalty of long roguery; he was utterly at his nephew's mercy. And his nephew shared his own hard, cold, selfish nature.

"All these threats are out of place," he said hoarsely.

"What you want me to do, I will do."

"First of all, Clare is to be laid by the heels."

"Are you resolved upon—"

"Immovably. Call down the captain. We will see whether this seaman dares to defy us. If he does, he shall repent it. Send the steward for him."

Captain Cleveland was on deck with Clare, the first and second mates being off duty. He received Gillet's message with surprise, but at once came down.

Selwyn, by thus calling the captain away, left "Mr. Ayrton" alone on the quarter-deck, and gave Edith the opportunity she had been longing for of speaking to Gerald Clare.

CHAPTER 4.

A Loyal Love—in Honour Bound—Denounced!—A True Shipmate—Leaves from the Past.

The sun had disappeared now, and only a glimmer of pale gold in the west marked where it had gone down.

Lights gleamed aboard the "Aurora," and from her head the red and green rays lay upon the sea with a bizarre effect.

In the fresh night breeze the canvas swelled and strained, the ropes and spars rattled.

Clare spoke to the man at the wheel, giving a brief direction, and then sauntered to the port quarter rail, where he was alone in the shadow of a boat, to think.

He had seen Edith and Selwyn talking together, and believed he had noted a dispute between them, and he was wondering what it was about. There could be no mistaking the sullen anger in Selwyn's face when he left the girl.

"Mr. Clare."

Clare started violently. Edith was at his side. The blank look he turned upon her told her that her guess was correct.

"Edith, how do you know?" he breathed.

"Forgive me for startling you. But it was necessary for me to know you in order to warn you. No one heard," Edith replied, in her sweet and gentle voice.

Clare recovered his composure in a moment. She was not looking at him with disdain or dislike. He was glad that the truth was out. He could speak now.

"When did you guess my identity, Miss Davenport?"

"I hardly know. Something about you chained my attention from our first meeting. The night the smack was run down I thought of you in connection with Gerald Clare. It has gradually dawned upon me since who you really are. Yet I was not sure until I spoke to you now."

"And now you know me—Clare, the convict—the captain of the 'Speranza,' who betrayed his trust—the wretch who

worked in the felon gang at Portland—the hunted fugitive!"
Clare said bitterly.

She looked at him with her clear, calm eyes.
"I believe you were innocent, Gerald," she answered steadily.

"You call me Gerald still?" He trembled in his emotion.
"Do you think of me still as Gerald?"
"Did you think I should forget you? Did you forget me?"
"Forget you!" he repeated. "Edith, the remembrance of you was all that kept me from rushing upon the bayonets of the warders."

"My poor, poor Gerald!" Her blue eyes became humid, swimming in tears, and she clasped her hands. "But I have suffered also through these two bitter years."

"Edith, is it possible that you love me still?"

"I do, I do!"

"My dearest!"

In the black shadow of the boat he clasped her to his heart, and their lips met and parted.

Edith drew back at once, blushing deeply.

"But, Gerald," she said hastily, "I came here to warn you."

"To warn me—of what?"

"You are in danger."

"Do you mean that my identity is suspected?"

"No; but it is known that you are on board the 'Aurora.'"

"Ah," Clare said quickly, "that is what Rupert Selwyn was saying to you."

"It was. But he does not suspect the truth. Still, he is in a terrible rage, because—because—"

"Because you have not forgotten me?" asked Clare.

"Because of that. And he declares that he will find you out and denounce you. Gerald, be on your guard. Take care, for my sake."

"I will do so, dearest; but I think there is little danger."

"Gerald"—Edith spoke after a pause—"can you not explain away the case against you?"

"I can only say that I am innocent."

"That I have always been sure of. But the money was taken, Gerald. Someone was guilty. Do you know who it was?"

He was silent. She repeated the question.

"Yes, Edith, I do know who it was," he replied reluctantly.

"Then why do you not proclaim his guilt?"

"I cannot."

"I heard Captain Cleveland declare his belief that you were shielding someone. Is it so?"

"I will conceal nothing from you. It is the truth."

"But, Gerald, who is worthy of this terrible sacrifice? Surely a thief does not merit such generosity at your hands?"

"Edith, I can tell you no more. I am in honour bound to suffer in silence."

"Ah," she said comprehensively, "you know the guilty party; but you have no proof. If you made your knowledge public, it would be regarded as a calumny?"

"No, no!" Clare exclaimed. "I could prove it."

"You could prove it?"

"Without difficulty. The second mate and the boatswain of the 'Speranza' know the truth; but I swore them to secrecy."

"They ought not to have taken such an oath."

"I persuaded them. But it is useless to try to make the matter clear. You may be sure that I did not make this sacrifice lightly—that I did not abandon liberty and love without being compelled to do so. If you could know the facts, Edith, you would know that I could do nothing else."

"But is there no chance of the wretch himself confessing, and so clearing your name?"

Clare smiled bitterly.

"None. He would laugh at the idea. Still, there is one gleam of light. When he dies he may leave a confession. I think he will. But I may be an old man then."

She saw that the subject was painful to him, and so she allowed it to drop, anxious as she was to penetrate the veil of the mystery.

It was clear to her that Clare was entangled in some fatal web from which there was no escape, and although she wished that he would confide in her, yet she was too tactful and delicate to urge him to do so.

"Whatever happens, Gerald, whether you are cleared or not, always remember that I trust you the same," she said softly.

"Ah, Edith, your love is a boon for which no suffering could be too high a price. Yet, do not forget that I am a convict, a hunted man. You are raising hopes in my heart which reason tells me can never be fulfilled."

She looked at him frankly as she answered:

"I could not marry without my father's consent. But I shall always love you, Gerald, and I shall keep the vow I secretly made when you were taken from me—never to become the wife of any other man."

The sound of someone ascending the companion made Edith leave Clare the next moment.

Clare stepped into the light of the binnacle lamp. His heart was beating joyously. Edith loved him; he had clasped her hand; he had pressed his lips to hers. Life was not a desert, after all.

Captain Cleveland came out of the companion, followed by his two passengers. There was a grim smile upon the skipper's bronzed face.

"Mr. Ayrton," he said, "these gentlemen have a fancy that the convict Clare is on board the 'Aurora.' Tell the boatswain to pipe all hands for a search."

"Ay, ay, sir!" replied Clare. And he promptly passed the word to the boatswain. Edith, watching him across the deck, marvelled at his coolness.

The boatswain's pipe shrilled, and the hands collected, wondering. Captain Cleveland briefly told them what was wanted. Most of the sailors looked amused. The idea of finding a stowaway after being more than a fortnight at sea did not seem sensible to them. But when the captain had done speaking, Rupert Selwyn stepped forward and said a few words, which caused the crew to take a serious view of the matter.

"Men, I have good reason for believing that Clare, Convict 33, is somewhere on board this vessel. To the man who discovers him I will pay a hundred pounds!"

To a foremast hand such a sum was a fortune. The sailors at once became eager. The excitement of a search, with the possibility of a tussle if a lurking ruffian should chance to be unearthed, furnished a pleasant break in the monotony of the voyage. Like gleeful schoolboys the bearded fellows' hands set about the hunt for the convict.

As Selwyn believed that Captain Cleveland connived at the concealment of the refugee, he kept his own eyes open during the search. The "Aurora" was ransacked fore and aft. Not a corner that could be got at was overlooked. At length the fact that no one was hidden aboard was patent even to the obstinate Selwyn.

What to think he knew not. He felt absolutely positive that Clare had sailed in the "Aurora," and that Edith knew it. Where was he, then?

"Are you satisfied, gentlemen?" Captain Cleveland asked, with a smile lurking about the corners of his mouth. "If you are not, I will have the ship overhauled again by daylight, to make assurance doubly sure."

"I am not satisfied!" answered Selwyn deliberately. "I believe that you, Captain Cleveland, have so far forgotten your duty as to shelter this slinking scoundrel, Clare, and I am determined to unearth him!"

And he swung away angrily, sullenly, before the skipper could reply.

"Don't mind him, Captain Cleveland," Joseph Davenport said in a low, nervous voice. "He is set upon this, and he is angry. For my part, I am perfectly satisfied."

Cleveland believed that Selwyn would have to give the matter up now; but he did not know the man.

Selwyn called the steward into his stateroom.

"Gillot," he said, "Captain Cleveland at one time or another concealed a convict on board this vessel. Now, if the rascal had been stowed in the hold, some of the hands must have seen him. It is my opinion that he was kept aft; and that could not have been done without your knowledge. You are liable to imprisonment for aiding a convict to escape. Do you see this?—it is a banknote for a hundred pounds. It is yours if you tell me where to find Gerald Clare."

Selwyn's searching glance went through the confused steward. He stammered, coloured, and finally blurted out the truth.

"I didn't want to help, sir, only Cap'n Cleveland threatened me with irons and discharge if I said anything—"

"You know that Gerald Clare is on board?"

"Will you keep it from the captain that I told you?" the steward conditioned, fearful of Cleveland's anger.

"Certainly. And take this note; it is yours!"

"The convict was hidden in a cask in the pantry, sir, when the police searched the vessel. But Cap'n Cleveland knew he couldn't be hid for the whole voyage, so he played a bold game, and put him, under a false name, on the ship's books."

"Ah," cried Selwyn eagerly, "that's it, is it? He was put in the forecabin as a sailor?"

"No, sir, he stayed aft, and—"

"The captain's friend! Ayrton! Blind fool that I have been. It was not for nothing that he fainted at the sight of Edith. Ah, now I know the meaning of her look when I told her I knew Clare to be here, and spoke of Ayrton in the next breath. Speak, man, is it Ayrton?"

"It is, Mr. Selwyn." The steward, half frightened by the result of his disclosure, trembled at the sight of the malignant exultation in Selwyn's face.

"It wasn't my fault; he got it out of me!" Gillot muttered uneasily, as Selwyn swiftly left him. "Anyway, the man's a

convict, and ought to be sent back whar he came from. Cap'n Cleveland had no right to make me break the law, nohow."

Captain Cleveland saw Selwyn reappear on deck, and was at once put on his guard by the young man's expression.

"You looked far enough for the convict, captain," Selwyn remarked abruptly, "but do you think you looked near enough?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that scoundrels who hide themselves in casks, and under assumed names, are not always safe from detection. What do you think, Mr. Ayrton?"

The direct question, and the insulting accent placed upon the "Mr. Ayrton," told Clare that he was discovered. But he did not lose his nerve.

He looked Selwyn calmly and steadily in the face; their glances met like drawn daggers.

"What do I think?" repeated Clare drawlingly. "Why, I think that if you apply the term 'scoundrel' to Gerald Clare, Mr. Selwyn, you are a liar and a cowardly slanderer!"

Selwyn panted with rage.

Clare did not deny the accusation. It would have been useless. Besides, Edith was there. In the presence of the girl he loved he would not shelter himself behind a lie.

His silence showed that Selwyn spoke the truth. But the men of the "Aurora" could hardly credit it still. Instead of a hulking, ferocious ruffian, they saw a frank, handsome sailor, one who during the past few weeks had earned their regard by many a little act of kindness and attention. Not a hand was raised against him.

Selwyn, by a great effort, regained his calmness. He wiped the blood from his mouth, and spoke coolly.

"Captain Cleveland, do you refuse to arrest Gerald Clare?"

"Yes, I do!" promptly replied the skipper.

"You do not deny that he is Convict 33?"

"I deny nothing, ye mean-spirited landlubber!"

Selwyn looked round for Davenport. The shipowner longed to scuttle below; but he knew that he was wanted, and he dared not go.

The denunciation of Clare had taken him wholly by surprise. But now he looked with attention at "Mr. Ayrton," he recognized many familiar lineaments.

He caught Selwyn's threatening look, and unwillingly came forward and played the part he had to play:

"Captain Cleveland, you are in command of my vessel, and are therefore under my orders. I order you to place this escaped convict in irons, to be delivered up to the police at Jamaica!"

Clare started as if a serpent had stung him.

"You—you—Joseph Davenport! You order me to be seized! You dare to give this order!" cried Clare, choking with passion.

The shipowner shifted uneasily.

"Why not?" he answered. "Do you expect me to connive at your escape?"

A torrent of words seemed about to pour from the lips of Gerald Clare. He struck his teeth upon his tongue to keep them back. His features worked convulsively.

Edith, who was watching him, seeing every change of his face clearly in the bright starlight, pressed her hand to her heart.

Like the searing of a hot iron a dreadful suspicion had shot through her brain. Every vestige of colour forsook her face, and wild pain grew in her wide eyes.

"Let me take you down, Miss Davenport."

"This is no sight for ye're pretty eyes."

She silently shook her head. Clare's emotion, which it cost him such a struggle to master, was a puzzle to most who saw it.

But it was the mastering it that puzzled Davenport. He had expected an outbreak, a hurricane of indignation and wild accusing, which he was prepared to hardily face. Clare's silence astonished while it greatly relieved him. He repeated his command to the captain.

"Captain Cleveland, do you dispute my authority?"

"I do!" the skipper answered. "On dry land you may give orders, but on the high seas I am captain, and my will is law. I will not place Mr. Clare in irons. I will not even have him arrested. I am resolved that he shall not be given up to the Jamaica police. On the other hand, I will brain with a handspike the first man that raises a finger against him."



Every word Clare had uttered had fallen upon other ears besides those of Captain Cleveland. A low, stifled cry broke the night stillness as Clare ceased to speak. It came from above. The two men, in consternation, looked up. The skylight was open, and at the aperture appeared the startled face of the eavesdropper.

"Captain Cleveland, there stands Clare, the convict! I call upon you to clap irons upon the rascal!"

The words were barely out of his mouth when he measured his length upon the deck, stretched there by a single blow from Clare's powerful arm.

Selwyn lay dazed; over him Clare still stood with clenched fist, flashing eyes, and heaving chest.

Captain Cleveland watched them in dumb dismay. From the watch on deck came excited exclamations, as the men crowded to see the "row."

Selwyn gained his feet. Blood streamed from his mouth. His face was livid, and demoniac in its expression.

"Men," he yelled, "that man is the convict Clare! I order you to seize him, in the name of the law!"

His voice rang from bowsprit to binnacle, and every soul on board the "Aurora" came running up to the deck.

The seamen looked from Selwyn to Clare, from Clare to the captain.

And Captain Cleveland bent his brows defiantly.

Selwyn ground his teeth with bitter rage.

He knew that it would be useless to call upon the crew. They rendered blind obedience to their captain. Owners to them were far off, hazy, hardly known. A captain was the personification of authority.

"Do you understand the consequences of your action, sir?" he said, in a hissing voice. "At Jamaica I will have you turned out of the ship, and prosecuted for aiding a convict to escape; and Clare shall be arrested the day we touch land."

"You will do as you like in Jamaica, but on board the 'Aurora' I command, and I order you to leave the deck, and if you don't obey I'll have you thrown down the hatchway!" cried the skipper, white with anger.

Selwyn went, perforce; he was powerless.

Curdy the captain ordered the seamen back to their places, and they dispersed, excitedly discussing the fracas.

Edith crept away to her cabin, white and trembling. The horror of her new, dark suspicion lay heavily upon her.

"Oh, Gerald, Gerald, was it for my sake?" she murmured.

Clare was much disturbed by the thought of the predicament in which he had brought his old shipmate.

Cleveland's friendship was likely to cost him dear.

Whether legal punishment awaited him or not, he was sure to be dismissed from his post in disgrace. That meant a black mark against his name for ever. Shipowners would be chary of employing him after it. His professional career was in all probability ruined.

"Would I had never come aboard the 'Aurora,' George," Clare said sadly. "It was selfish to do so. I have brought ruin upon you."

"Don't talk of that, Gerald, old man. We will sink or swim together like true shipmates."

Clare gripped his hand.

"Heaven bless you, George! You are indeed a true friend."

"Clare," Cleveland said abruptly, "I have made a discovery."

Clare looked uneasy.

"What have you discovered, George?"

"The man who stole the money on board the 'Speranza'?"

"Who, for Heaven's sake?"

"Joseph Davenport."

Clare groaned in bitterness of spirit.

"How have I betrayed myself?" he said miserably.

"Come down to my cabin, where we can talk unheard," the skipper said.

Down in the cosy cabin, Cleveland shut the door. In the lamplight, Clare looked very pale.

"The idea has been slowly forming in my mind," Cleveland said. "There is much evidence. Somebody on board the 'Speranza' stole the money—someone for whom you had reason to make a tremendous sacrifice. Since the 'Aurora' sailed, I have seen that you love Edith Davenport."

This was said with something of an effort. Cleveland had come to the conclusion that not only Clare loved Edith, but Edith also loved Clare. He was doing his best to conquer his own luckless passion. He knew that Clare's claim was of older standing.

"But," resumed Cleveland, "it was the way you looked when Davenport demanded your arrest that convinced me."

"Fool—fool that I was to betray myself."

"No man could have helped it at such a moment. What I wonder at is your not speaking out."

"Ah, you do not know how I am bound."

"Clare, is not the time come for frankness? I know the truth; give me the whole story. Perhaps I can help you out of this horrible fix."

Clare shook his head sadly.

"I am afraid not, George. But since you know so much, there is no reason why you should not know all. But you must pledge your word not to reveal anything of this."

"Of course, that is understood."

"You were right; Davenport is the thief. I will tell the story from the beginning, however. I commanded the 'Speranza,' and Davenport and his daughter were passengers. How easily I fell in love with Edith you may guess, for you have seen her, and know her beauty and goodness. When I learned that my love was returned, I was in ecstasies."

Clare's voice grew soft, his eyes dreamy; he did not notice how Cleveland's features twitched.

"Davenport seemed to take a liking to me; he took every opportunity of helping me on. I was grateful to him, and believed him the best fellow in the world. I had heard of his hardness—his cold-heartedness—but then, he was Edith's father, and that discounted everything. As a rule we do not gather grapes from thorns. I did not know that I had discovered the exception to the rule," Clare said bitterly.

"So you were engaged?" Cleveland said, in a low voice.

"Yes, with Davenport's consent; but he stipulated that it

should not be made public, on account of Edith's youth; she was only seventeen then. I thought that a frivolous reason; but I would have agreed to anything then. So on board the 'Speranza,' though all could see the way things went, our name became notorious, Edith's was not mentioned in connection with it. Now, I know that Davenport made me his tool, through my love for Edith, in the stealing of the twenty thousand pounds he had all along planned to obtain."

"And you fell into the trap?"

"Blindly. The money was in a chest in the strong-room of the 'Speranza.' In the same room was a chest of similar construction belonging to Davenport. This was to be left at Bermuda, while the money-chest was to be carried on to Port Royal. My chief mate, Burnside, was Davenport's confederate. At Bermuda I was taken with a fainting-fit, which left me so feeble that I was kept to my bunk. I gave the keys of the strong-room to the chief mate, and told him to send Davenport's chest ashore. There was no time to be lost, for it was to be forwarded to its destination in a vessel sailing the next day from Bermuda. Burnside informed me later that he had carried out my orders, and returned me the keys. Had I any cause for suspicion?"

"None," Cleveland said slowly.

"We sailed. I was still too weak to leave my bunk. A couple of days later the second mate and bo'sun—Thomson and Richardson—came to me with very serious faces. They had helped take the chest from the strong-room, and they had suspicions that not Davenport's chest, but the other, had been taken. Davenport had told them himself that it was his one; and, under Burnside's orders, and positive assertion that there was no mistake, they had not ventured to disturb me in my illness. But now I was well they thought it best to speak out. Of course, I laughed at a tale which branded my chief mate as a traitor, and Edith's father as a thief. But when I mentioned the matter to Davenport there came a thunder-clap."

"Did he confess?"

"With the utmost frankness. He told me, with a hardness that astounded me, that the money was gone, and that I had better make the best of it. He had shipped his chest with the idea of changing it by some trick for that containing the gold. My simplicity and love for Edith had saved him the trouble of plotting and planning. My illness at Bermuda was caused by a drug he had given me in a friendly glass of wine. His calm confession of villainy struck me dumb. Encouraged by my silence, he went on to say that nothing need ever become known. If I were sensible enough to wreck the 'Speranza,' the crew could be saved in the boats, and the gold would be supposed to go down with the ship. When I found my voice, I said: 'You shall finish this voyage in irons!'

"And what of Edith?" he asked. Then I remembered Edith. I offered him oblivion if he would aid me to regain the money. He laughed, and said it was for ever beyond my reach. 'You love Edith,' he said. 'Will you send her father to a felon's doom? And, mark me, whatever my fate, she shall share it! I will declare in court that she was my accomplice. That it was she who drew off your attention from the strong-room while we changed the boxes. That she knew it all from beginning to end. If I go to prison, thither goes Edith!'

Captain Cleveland gritted his teeth. Fierce indignation gleamed in his eyes.

"The coward—the poltroon!" he cried.

"He was so enraged by my refusal to take what he considered a sensible view of the matter, that he meant every word he said. If I exposed him he would wreak the bitterest revenge he could upon me, and that meant the sacrifice of Edith."

"You think he would really have done it?"

"I am sure of it. He went on to explain cynically what his plan would be. By representing himself as a doting father, the tool of an unscrupulous daughter, he would gain sympathy at the trial, and get off with a light sentence."

"And he is the father of Edith!" Captain Cleveland said, with a sort of wonder.

"A grape from a thorn, as I said. Now, Cleveland, if it had been a question of dragging Edith's name in the dust by proclaiming her father's guilt, I should have hesitated; but when the question was of Edith standing beside him in the prisoner's dock, of hearing her honour and liberty sworn away by her own father, and then of going to the doom of female convicts—answer me, George, what could I do?"

"What I hope I should have done in your place," said Cleveland, with tears in his eyes.

"I could have killed the cynical, iron-hearted scoundrel as he sat there talking, with his devilish coolness. He begged me to take a common-sense view of the matter. Why not sink the ship? My record was so clear that no one would doubt that it was an accident. No lives might be lost. If one or two were—well, the men had to die, sooner or later. How I loathed him!"

Clare trembled with rage as he recalled the most anguished hour of his chequered life.

"Poor Edith!"
"I made up my mind very quickly. The gold was irretrievably lost; my employers would not benefit by the truth being told. There must be a victim—it was Edith or I. You can guess that I did not delay in deciding which it was to be. I told Davenport he had only to keep silent, and I would take the burden of his guilt, for Edith's sake. Astonishment kept him speechless for a time. Then he urged me not to be such a fool. Why not sink the ship? I cut him short. He willingly agreed, when he saw I was resolved. I swore Thomond and Richardson to secrecy concerning what they knew. It was a matter of difficulty, that, but, for Edith's sake, the honest fellows at last gave way."

"So you arranged that simply enough?"
"My chief difficulty, strange to say, lay in Burnside."
"One of the thieves."
"Yes. He was not a bad fellow in the main, but weak, and led astray by Davenport, who was as cunning as a fiend. When I told him my decision, he was struck with remorse. He told me his motive for the crime. He had a motherless daughter, the prey of a disease which there was no hope of curing unless she were taken to a southern climate and supplied with care and skill which only wealth could command. His pay as chief mate only sufficed to keep her in shabby comfort in an English provincial town. To resign his post, so that he could take her to Italy, and there nurse her and watch over her, was his object, and that required a large sum of money. And it was in this desperate strait that there came Davenport to tempt him. I am sure the temptation was sore; the life of his child was at stake. But he told me, with tears streaming down his face, that Davenport had assured him that I should be willing to sink the 'Speranza' to conceal the theft, or he would never have shared in it. He was agonised at the thought of sending me to prison for his crime; he even declared his intention of making a clean breast of it when we came to port; but the remembrance of his little girl changed that. Strange as it may seem, Cleveland, I found myself comforting him whose treachery had so ruined me. But for that one deed he had a clean record of forty years; he was honest at heart. But for Joseph Davenport can I feel anything but hatred and contempt?"

"There is no name for his baseness."
"You know the rest. You were absent on a voyage when the 'Speranza' arrived in port, for I turned back, and did not go to Port Royal, after all. My cargo was for other ports; only the money was for Jamaica, and without it it was useless for me to go there and face a storm of questions. But from the papers you know how the case went. At my trial I only said that the money was gone, and that I had not taken it. Of course, I was found guilty. There could be no other verdict, as I offered no defence. I was sentenced to seven years' penal servitude." Clare clasped his hands together in a convulsive way. "I, who had never wronged a soul!"

"It was heroic."
"But I could not endure slavery. At the first opportunity I escaped. I hardly know now how I managed it; but I did. Then followed the hunt. Heavens! what I suffered, hunted and tracked like a wild beast!"

There was silence for a few minutes. Then Cleveland said:
"And, in spite of this, Davenport dared demand your arrest this evening?"

"I think he is under the thumb of Selwyn, who is my rival. You have seen that. But Davenport does not know that I could prove my innocence. By making no defence at the trial I tacitly admitted my guilt, and anything I said now would not be believed. This evening he was prepared for me to pour out the truth when he baited me. He would have coolly pooch-pooched it. It has not struck him that Thomond and Richardson, who carried the changed chest from the 'Speranza's' strong-room at his and Burnside's orders, could be found, and called upon for evidence. I could still send him to gaol in my place, if I chose. My forbearance is greater than he thinks."

"Clare, you must be made of iron to endure it," Captain Cleveland said.

There was a long pause.

"And now you know the facts," Clare said, "you see that I am in honour bound to keep silence. For Edith's sake I would still let the true story come out. Whether Davenport would still carry out his threat with regard to her I cannot say. But having once taken up the burden it would be cowardly of me to turn back now, and bring disgrace and shame upon her. She shall never know her father's guilt."

But Clare's generous wish was futile.

Edith knew!

Knew, for every word Clare had uttered had fallen upon other ears besides those of Captain Cleveland.

A low, stifled cry broke the night stillness as Clare ceased to speak. It came from above. The two men, in consterna-

tion, looked up. The skylight was open, and at the aperture appeared the startled face of the eavesdropper.

CHAPTER 5.

A Jealous Man's Crime—The Shadow of Death—After Darkness, Light.

With throbbing head and aching heart Edith had sought the deck, hoping, in the cool night wind, to calm her almost uncontrollable agitation.

She wished to be alone, to think; but her faculties seemed numbed, incapable of consecutive thought.

She sank upon the frame of the cabin skylight to rest; she felt weak, and, besides, did not want to be seen and spoken to. The spanker cast a black bar of shadow across the skylight.

The light was open a little, for the "Aurora" was now in West Indian waters, and the weather was extremely warm. The buzz of voices reached her from below; she paid no heed, until she recognised Clare's voice, and her father's name.

"Davenport is the thief!"
She sat like one entranced, or, rather, petrified, while Clare went on to tell the story of Davenport's perfidy.

It was not till Clare had ended that the spellbound girl remembered where she was, and that she had been listening to talk not intended for her ears. She strove to rise, to escape below; but she could not restrain the great sob that shook her whole stricken being. The next minute Clare stood before her.

"Edith!"
He caught her reeling form in his arms, and unceremoniously carried her down the ladder. The cuddy was fortunately untenanted. He placed her on a sofa. He saw her white, waxy face, and groaned.

"Oh, Edith! Then you know! A thousand curses upon my blabbing tongue!"

"I have heard, Gerald. I did not mean to listen—I was seated there—I could not help it."

"Edith, can you ever forgive me?"

"Forgive you—the noblest, most generous of men? Oh, Gerald, I am not worthy of your love! You have sacrificed too much for me. You shall no longer suffer for my father's crime. The truth shall be told!"

"Indeed!" It was the cold, sneering voice of Joseph Davenport; he had come out of his stateroom on hearing their voices. "Clare, I do not allow escaped convicts to hold converse with my daughter! Go!"

Clare's eyes flashed fire.
Edith rose, and fixed a withering glance upon the wretched schemer and swindler whom fate forced her to call "father."

"Man, can you utter such words for very shame?" she said. "I know the whole story of your guilt."

"Ah, our Quixote has repented of his quixotism, it seems!"
"It was by accident—" began Clare hotly.

"Oh, of course, accidents will happen!" sneered Davenport, with a gesture of disbelief.

Clare turned hot all over with rage. If only this man had not been Edith's father!

"But whatever cock-and-bull story you have told, I don't think you can prove it," continued Davenport.

Clare could not help giving him a home-thrust back.

"Oh, yes, I could. The evidence of Thomond and Richardson could yet be called. Nor do I think that Burnside would deny the truth if placed upon his oath."

Davenport appeared struck by this; he reflected, and the deepening pallor of his face showed that his fears were aroused. There was a long silence.

Selwyn's door opened; he had been watching and listening with it ajar.

"Convict," he said, throwing into his voice all the venom of his mean nature, "you are not in the manacles, yours by right; but there is a limit to your license! Miss Davenport is my affianced wife. Leave her, and if you speak a word again to her, I will chastise you like a dog!"

Clare, mad with rage, sprang towards his insurer; but even then he stopped, remembering Edith's presence.

But that was enough for Selwyn. Out came his hand, with the revolver glittering in it.

A moment more, and Clare, unprepared for such a murderous move, would have lain upon the planks with a bullet in his head or heart. But a man sprang upon Selwyn just in time; it was Captain Cleveland. In an iron grip, Selwyn's wrist was forced upward, and thither flew the bullet, shattering the glass of the cuddy skylight.

Edith, at sight and sound of a deadly weapon, gave a low cry, and clung to Clare, and for the moment the young man's attention was chained to the swooning girl.

Selwyn, utterly exasperated by being balked at the last moment, lost his senses with rage, and strove to turn the revolver upon Captain Cleveland.

By a sudden jerk he freed his wrist from the clutch of Captain Cleveland.

"Look out!" yelled the skipper, as Selwyn began to pull the trigger.

Crack! crack! crack! The next smashed the swinging lamp, one shot flew wild; the third found a billet plunging the cuddy into darkness. The third found a billet in a human body.

The shots brought the crew tumbling aft, and O'Brien and Evans came running down the companion.

They were rushing to Captain Cleveland's aid when the lamp went out.

But Selwyn had no time for more frantic shooting. The clenched fist of Cleveland smote him down, and he fell dazed. O'Brien had sprung for a lantern; he came back with it in a second or two. Then Clare and Cleveland pinioned Selwyn, and tore away his weapon.

"Hold him, Brown, Gillet, Tremlow!" said Captain Cleveland to three gaping men. "He has tried to murder Mr. Clare, and I fear has done some terrible harm."

Selwyn, sobered and calmed by the catastrophe, stood white and trembling in the grip of his guards.

Clare, wild with fear for Edith, gave a sob of relief when he saw that the victim of the blind shot was not she. She had been secured by her recumbent position.

But Joseph Davenport, peering forward in the hope of seeing Clare's death, had been struck in the chest; the bullet, wildly fired, had missed Clare by a foot or more.

Upon his back lay the schemer, with ashy face, insensible, while thick blood welled out over his shirt-front.

Protesting, cursing, and struggling, Selwyn was hauled away; and soon was heard the musical clink of the carpenter's hammer as he riveted the gyes.

Up to this time Edith had been unaware of what had happened. But now her faculties were reviving. Cleveland cleared the cuddy, and retired himself to Davenport's stateroom; it was his duty to turn doctor for the nonce. Clare was the best man to explain to Edith.

"Gerald!" Edith came to, and found her head resting upon her lover's breast, and his arm supporting her. She blushed vividly, and would have withdrawn, but Clare spoke in a low, sombre tone:

"Edith, can you bear bad news?"

Instinct told her what Clare found it so hard to say. She sprang up.

"My father!"

Yes, he was her father again now; his wickedness was forgotten in the hour of his suffering. To Edith he was no longer the schemer and betrayer, he was "father."

"Where is he?"

Clare led her into the stateroom. In the bunk Joseph Davenport lay, unconscious still. Captain Cleveland had found the wound, and found it mortal. Davenport might linger for days, but his doom was sealed.

Edith stood by the side of the parent who had never cared for her, and her heart was torn with woe.

When Davenport learned that his case was hopeless, he at first refused to believe it. When he could no longer doubt, he was stricken with terror. Unable now to profit by his wickedness, he felt remorse, as such natures do. The devotion of his daughter touched him, too. He had robbed her of life's happiness by branding her lover as a convict, yet she attended him as if he were the best of parents.

But still Davenport did not make any confession of the "Speranza" affair.

"There is plenty of time," he said, when Captain Cleveland delicately and gravely mentioned the matter to him.

"You are mistaken. There is very little time, Mr. Davenport. Surely you intend to do justice before you die?"

"Shall I live till we reach port?"

"It is possible."

"Then you shall have my decision at Port Royal."

And from that he would not budge.

"He still has a mad hope that a surgeon may be able to save him," Cleveland said to Clare. "I greatly fear he may die without confessing."

"I do not know that I shall be disappointed," Clare replied.

"Even the truth will be horrible for Edith, if it is published."

"That is carrying quixotism too far. Yet, in case he does not clear you, you must be prepared for flight at Port Royal. With Davenport dying, and Selwyn in irons, there will be no one to betray you. You shall go ashore twenty-four hours before I allow another soul to leave the ship. Then I should advise you to go before the mast, under an assumed name, to one of the South American ports."

Day after day the "Aurora" kept on before fair breezes. The approach to port was miserable to Clare, thinking of the parting with Edith. It was horrible to Selwyn, anticipating prison, and a charge of manslaughter, if not murder.

Selwyn was in an unenviable state of mind as he sat, day after day, amidships, eating and sleeping with the shackles

ever on his limbs. If he had killed Clare he would have had little fear of punishment. It would have been a "fatal affair" with an escaped convict, and Davenport's evidence in his favour would at least have balanced that of Captain Cleveland against him. But now it was Davenport who was dying, and folly, and fear of the future, made Rupert Selwyn's life a

Port Royal at last!

The crew had hardly settled the "Aurora" in her anchorage when a police-cutter ran alongside, and six men in uniform came over the side.

Captain Cleveland staggered. That they were police, on an unusual errand, he could see. It was no port business, but an arrest, they had come for.

"This is the 'Aurora,'" said the sergeant, with a respectful salute to her commander.

"She is, sir. I am Captain Cleveland. To what do I owe this honour?"

"Sorry, sir; but we have to arrest a passenger of yours. Better advise him to come quietly."

Clare, white and calm, came forward.

"Here I am," he said. "Take me. I am your prisoner. But for Heaven's sake get it over quickly! There is a lady onboard; she must not see me taken."

"Who are you?" asked the sergeant, staring at him. "You are too young for the man we want—Joseph Davenport, aged fifty, owner of this vessel."

Clare almost reeled. It was not Gerald Clare, then, whom the police were seeking, but Joseph Davenport. Of course, what a fool he had been! How could the police of Jamaica possibly know that Convict 55 was on board the "Aurora"?

"For what do you want Joseph Davenport?" asked Captain Cleveland, in wonder.

"He is charged with stealing twenty thousand pounds on board the 'Speranza,' at Bermuda, two years ago."

"He is below. But you cannot take him; he is dying."

The sergeant looked startled.

"I don't doubt your word, captain; but, of course, I must satisfy myself that he cannot be removed."

"Come, then."

The sergeant followed Cleveland down to Davenport's stateroom. The sick man had heard voices on deck; he looked up as the police-officer came quietly in.

"What does this mean?" asked Davenport, with wild eyes full of fear. "Is it my arrest they seek?"

"Burnside has confessed," Cleveland said, gently enough. The shipowner's head sank lower.

"It is over," he said, with unnatural calmness. "I yield. God have mercy upon me a sinner! Bring me pen and paper, and I will tell all."

Davenport's confession was hardly needed; but it completed the evidence of Clare's innocence.

Clare was cleared. He voluntarily surrendered himself, and was sent back to England to receive his "pardon."

But Edith remained at Port Royal to nurse her father to the end, doing her duty tenderly till death closed his eyes.

When the "Aurora" weighed anchor for the homeward voyage she was in it; but Joseph Davenport lay beneath the sod in the Kingston Cemetery.

And Rupert Selwyn? Indicted for manslaughter, he was found guilty, and a sentence of three years was the reward he received for his iniquity; nor could all his wealth and influence save him from his fate. He had taunted Clare with the title of convict; it was now his own. And few were found to pity him.

The tenderest brother could not have been more devoted and kind to the fatherless girl than was Captain Cleveland on the "Aurora's" homeward voyage. His own luckless love he had buried deep in his heart; in the years after it was only a pleasant, fragrant memory.

At Cardiff, Gerald Clare was waiting to meet the ship; not ashore, but aboard a fine vessel his old employers had placed under his command. The true story of the "Speranza" affair had revealed the fact that Clare had run every risk rather than save himself and betray his trust by sinking the craft; he commanded. Such faithfulness, added to his heroism in facing a convict-prison for the sake of the girl he loved, naturally recommended him to favour, and he was very quickly reinstated in his old position.

Clare went off in his own boat to board the "Aurora" and greet his returning friends.

The joy of their meeting we shall not attempt to describe. It was only a few months later that Edith became the wife of the man who had suffered so much for her sake, and whom she had loved truly through good and ill report.

After so many trials, happiness came all the sweeter; and by degrees Clare is forgetting the horror of the old days, when he was a convict, and "in honour bound" to remain one.

THE END.