

***MARCUS ANDREW
HISLOP CLARKE***



***FOR THE TERM
OF HIS NATURAL
LIFE***

Marcus Andrew Hislop Clarke

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PROLOGUE.

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On the evening of May 3, 1827, the garden of a large red-brick bow-windowed mansion called North End House, which, enclosed in spacious grounds, stands on the eastern height of Hampstead Heath, between Finchley Road and the Chestnut Avenue, was the scene of a domestic tragedy.

Three persons were the actors in it. One was an old man, whose white hair and wrinkled face gave token that he was at least sixty years of age. He stood erect with his back to the wall, which separates the garden from the Heath, in the attitude of one surprised into sudden passion, and held uplifted the heavy ebony cane upon which he was ordinarily accustomed to lean. He was confronted by a man of two-and-twenty, unusually tall and athletic of figure, dresses in rough seafaring clothes, and who held in his arms, protecting her, a lady of middle age. The face of the young man wore an expression of horror-stricken astonishment, and the slight frame of the grey-haired woman was convulsed with sobs.

These three people were Sir Richard Devine, his wife, and his only son Richard, who had returned from abroad that morning.

“So, madam,” said Sir Richard, in the high-strung accents which in crises of great mental agony are common to the most self-restrained of us, “you have been for twenty years a living lie! For twenty years you have cheated and mocked me. For twenty years—in company with a scoundrel whose name is a byword for all that is profligate and base—you have laughed at me for a credulous and hood-winked fool;

and now, because I dared to raise my hand to that reckless boy, you confess your shame, and glory in the confession!"

"Mother, dear mother!" cried the young man, in a paroxysm of grief, "say that you did not mean those words; you said them but in anger! See, I am calm now, and he may strike me if he will."

Lady Devine shuddered, creeping close, as though to hide herself in the broad bosom of her son.

The old man continued: "I married you, Ellinor Wade, for your beauty; you married me for my fortune. I was a plebeian, a ship's carpenter; you were well born, your father was a man of fashion, a gambler, the friend of rakes and prodigals. I was rich. I had been knighted. I was in favour at Court. He wanted money, and he sold you. I paid the price he asked, but there was nothing of your cousin, my Lord Bellasis and Wotton, in the bond."

"Spare me, sir, spare me!" said Lady Ellinor faintly.

"Spare you! Ay, you have spared me, have you not? Look ye," he cried, in sudden fury, "I am not to be fooled so easily. Your family are proud. Colonel Wade has other daughters. Your lover, my Lord Bellasis, even now, thinks to retrieve his broken fortunes by marriage. You have confessed your shame. To-morrow your father, your sisters, all the world, shall know the story you have told me!"

"By Heaven, sir, you will not do this!" burst out the young man.

"Silence, bastard!" cried Sir Richard. "Ay, bite your lips; the word is of your precious mother's making!"

Lady Devine slipped through her son's arms and fell on her knees at her husband's feet.

"Do not do this, Richard. I have been faithful to you for two-and-twenty years. I have borne all the slights and insults you have heaped upon me. The shameful secret of my early love broke from me when in your rage, you

threatened him. Let me go away; kill me; but do not shame me.”

Sir Richard, who had turned to walk away, stopped suddenly, and his great white eyebrows came together in his red face with a savage scowl. He laughed, and in that laugh his fury seemed to congeal into a cold and cruel hate.

“You would preserve your good name then. You would conceal this disgrace from the world. You shall have your wish—upon one condition.”

“What is it, sir?” she asked, rising, but trembling with terror, as she stood with drooping arms and widely opened eyes.

The old man looked at her for an instant, and then said slowly, “That this impostor, who so long has falsely borne my name, has wrongfully squandered my money, and unlawfully eaten my bread, shall pack! That he abandon for ever the name he has usurped, keep himself from my sight, and never set foot again in house of mine.”

“You would not part me from my only son!” cried the wretched woman.

“Take him with you to his father then.”

Richard Devine gently loosed the arms that again clung around his neck, kissed the pale face, and turned his own—scarcely less pale—towards the old man.

“I owe you no duty,” he said. “You have always hated and reviled me. When by your violence you drove me from your house, you set spies to watch me in the life I had chosen. I have nothing in common with you. I have long felt it. Now when I learn for the first time whose son I really am, I rejoice to think that I have less to thank you for than I once believed. I accept the terms you offer. I will go. Nay, mother, think of your good name.”

Sir Richard Devine laughed again. “I am glad to see you are so well disposed. Listen now. To-night I send for Quaid to

alter my will. My sister's son, Maurice Frere, shall be my heir in your stead. I give you nothing. You leave this house in an hour. You change your name; you never by word or deed make claim on me or mine. No matter what strait or poverty you plead—if even your life should hang upon the issue—the instant I hear that there exists on earth one who calls himself Richard Devine, that instant shall your mother's shame become a public scandal. You know me. I keep my word. I return in an hour, madam; let me find him gone.”

He passed them, upright, as if upborne by passion, strode down the garden with the vigour that anger lends, and took the road to London.

“Richard!” cried the poor mother. “Forgive me, my son! I have ruined you.”

Richard Devine tossed his black hair from his brow in sudden passion of love and grief.

“Mother, dear mother, do not weep,” he said. “I am not worthy of your tears. Forgive! It is I—impetuous and ungrateful during all your years of sorrow—who most need forgiveness. Let me share your burden that I may lighten it. He is just. It is fitting that I go. I can earn a name—a name that I need not blush to bear nor you to hear. I am strong. I can work. The world is wide. Farewell! my own mother!”

“Not yet, not yet! Ah! see he has taken the Belsize Road. Oh, Richard, pray Heaven they may not meet.”

“Tush! They will not meet! You are pale, you faint!”

“A terror of I know not what coming evil overpowers me. I tremble for the future. Oh, Richard, Richard! Forgive me! Pray for me.”

“Hush, dearest! Come, let me lead you in. I will write. I will send you news of me once at least, ere I depart. So—you are calmer, mother!”

Sir Richard Devine, knight, shipbuilder, naval contractor, and millionaire, was the son of a Harwich boat carpenter. Early left an orphan with a sister to support, he soon reduced his sole aim in life to the accumulation of money. In the Harwich boat-shed, nearly fifty years before, he had contracted—in defiance of prophesied failure—to build the Hastings sloop of war for His Majesty King George the Third's Lords of the Admiralty. This contract was the thin end of that wedge which eventually split the mighty oak block of Government patronage into three-deckers and ships of the line; which did good service under Pellew, Parker, Nelson, Hood; which exfoliated and ramified into huge dockyards at Plymouth, Portsmouth, and Sheerness, and bore, as its buds and flowers, countless barrels of measly pork and maggoty biscuit. The sole aim of the coarse, pushing and hard-headed son of Dick Devine was to make money. He had cringed and crawled and fluttered and blustered, had licked the dust off great men's shoes, and danced attendance in great men's ante-chambers. Nothing was too low, nothing too high for him. A shrewd man of business, a thorough master of his trade, troubled with no scruples of honour or of delicacy, he made money rapidly, and saved it when made. The first hint that the public received of his wealth was in 1796, when Mr. Devine, one of the shipwrights to the Government, and a comparatively young man of forty-four or thereabouts, subscribed five thousand pounds to the Loyalty Loan raised to prosecute the French war. In 1805, after doing good, and it was hinted not unprofitable, service in the trial of Lord Melville, the Treasurer of the Navy, he married his sister to a wealthy Bristol merchant, one Anthony Frere, and married himself to Ellinor Wade, the eldest daughter of Colonel Wotton Wade, a boon companion of the Regent, and uncle by marriage of a remarkable scamp and dandy, Lord Bellasis. At that time, what with lucky speculations in the Funds—assisted, it was whispered, by secret intelligence from France during the stormy years

of '13, '14, and '15—and the legitimate profit on his Government contracts, he had accumulated a princely fortune, and could afford to live in princely magnificence. But the old-man-of-the-sea burden of parsimony and avarice which he had voluntarily taken upon him was not to be shaken off, and the only show he made of his wealth was by purchasing, on his knighthood, the rambling but comfortable house at Hampstead, and ostensibly retiring from active business.

His retirement was not a happy one. He was a stern father and a severe master. His servants hated, and his wife feared him. His only son Richard appeared to inherit his father's strong will and imperious manner. Under careful supervision and a just rule he might have been guided to good; but left to his own devices outside, and galled by the iron yoke of parental discipline at home, he became reckless and prodigal. The mother—poor, timid Ellinor, who had been rudely torn from the love of her youth, her cousin, Lord Bellasis—tried to restrain him, but the head-strong boy, though owing for his mother that strong love which is often a part of such violent natures, proved intractable, and after three years of parental feud, he went off to the Continent, to pursue there the same reckless life which in London had offended Sir Richard. Sir Richard, upon this, sent for Maurice Frere, his sister's son—the abolition of the slave trade had ruined the Bristol House of Frere—and bought for him a commission in a marching regiment, hinting darkly of special favours to come. His open preference for his nephew had galled to the quick his sensitive wife, who contrasted with some heart-pangs the gallant prodigality of her father with the niggardly economy of her husband. Between the houses of parvenu Devine and long-descended Wotton Wade there had long been little love. Sir Richard felt that the colonel despised him for a city knight, and had heard that over claret and cards Lord Bellasis and his friends had

often lamented the hard fortune which gave the beauty, Ellinor, to so sordid a bridegroom. Armigell Esme Wade, Viscount Bellasis and Wotton, was a product of his time. Of good family (his ancestor, Armigell, was reputed to have landed in America before Gilbert or Raleigh), he had inherited his manor of Bellasis, or Belsize, from one Sir Esme Wade, ambassador from Queen Elizabeth to the King of Spain in the delicate matter of Mendoza, and afterwards counsellor to James I, and Lieutenant of the Tower. This Esme was a man of dark devices. It was he who negotiated with Mary Stuart for Elizabeth; it was he who wormed out of Cobham the evidence against the great Raleigh. He became rich, and his sister (the widow of Henry de Kirkhaven, Lord of Hemfleet) marrying into the family of the Wottons, the wealth of the house was further increased by the union of her daughter Sybil with Marmaduke Wade. Marmaduke Wade was a Lord of the Admiralty, and a patron of Pepys, who in his diary [July 17, 1668] speaks of visiting him at Belsize. He was raised to the peerage in 1667 by the title of Baron Bellasis and Wotton, and married for his second wife Anne, daughter of Philip Stanhope, second Earl of Chesterfield. Allied to this powerful house, the family tree of Wotton Wade grew and flourished.

In 1784, Philip, third Baron, married the celebrated beauty, Miss Povey, and had issue Armigell Esme, in whose person the family prudence seemed to have run itself out.

The fourth Lord Bellasis combined the daring of Armigell, the adventurer, with the evil disposition of Esme, the Lieutenant of the Tower. No sooner had he become master of his fortune than he took to dice, drink, and debauchery with all the extravagance of the last century. He was foremost in every riot, most notorious of all the notorious "bloods" of the day.

Horace Walpole, in one of his letters to Selwyn in 1785, mentions a fact which may stand for a page of narrative.

“Young Wade,” he says, “is reported to have lost one thousand guineas last night to that vulgarest of all the Bourbons, the Duc de Chartres, and they say the fool is not yet nineteen.” From a pigeon Armigell Wade became a hawk, and at thirty years of age, having lost together with his estates all chance of winning the one woman who might have saved him—his cousin Ellinor—he became that most unhappy of all beings, a well-born blackleg. When he was told by thin-lipped, cool Colonel Wade that the rich shipbuilder, Sir Richard Devine, had proposed an alliance with fair-haired gentle Ellinor, he swore, with fierce knitting of his black brows, that no law of man nor Heaven should further restrain him in his selfish prodigality. “You have sold your daughter and ruined me,” he said; “look to the consequences.” Colonel Wade sneered at his fiery kinsman: “You will find Sir Richard's house a pleasant one to visit, Armigell; and he should be worth an income to so experienced a gambler as yourself.” Lord Bellasis did visit at Sir Richard's house during the first year of his cousin's marriage; but upon the birth of the son who is the hero of this history, he affected a quarrel with the city knight, and cursing him to the Prince and Poins for a miserly curmudgeon, who neither dined nor drank like a gentleman, departed, more desperately at war with fortune than ever, for his old haunts. The year 1827 found him a hardened, hopeless old man of sixty, battered in health and ruined in pocket; but who, by dint of stays, hair-dye, and courage, yet faced the world with undaunted front, and dined as gaily in bailiff-haunted Belsize as he had dined at Carlton House. Of the possessions of the House of Wotton Wade, this old manor, timberless and bare, was all that remained, and its master rarely visited it.

On the evening of May 3, 1827, Lord Bellasis had been attending a pigeon match at Hornsey Wood, and having resisted the importunities of his companion, Mr. Lionel

Crofton (a young gentleman-rake, whose position in the sporting world was not the most secure), who wanted him to go on into town, he had avowed his intention of striking across Hampstead to Belsize. "I have an appointment at the fir trees on the Heath," he said.

"With a woman?" asked Mr. Crofton.

"Not at all; with a parson."

"A parson!"

"You stare! Well, he is only just ordained. I met him last year at Bath on his vacation from Cambridge, and he was good enough to lose some money to me."

"And now waits to pay it out of his first curacy. I wish your lordship joy with all my soul. Then, we must push on, for it grows late."

"Thanks, my dear sir, for the 'we,' but I must go alone," said Lord Bellasis dryly. "To-morrow you can settle with me for the sitting of last week. Hark! the clock is striking nine. Good night."

At half-past nine Richard Devine quitted his mother's house to begin the new life he had chosen, and so, drawn together by that strange fate of circumstances which creates events, the father and son approached each other.

As the young man gained the middle of the path which led to the Heath, he met Sir Richard returning from the village. It was no part of his plan to seek an interview with the man whom his mother had so deeply wronged, and he would have slunk past in the gloom; but seeing him thus alone returning to a desolated home, the prodigal was tempted to utter some words of farewell and of regret. To his astonishment, however, Sir Richard passed swiftly on, with body bent forward as one in the act of falling, and with eyes unconscious of surroundings, staring straight into the

distance. Half-terrified at this strange appearance, Richard hurried onward, and at a turn of the path stumbled upon something which horribly accounted for the curious action of the old man. A dead body lay upon its face in the heather; beside it was a heavy riding whip stained at the handle with blood, and an open pocket-book. Richard took up the book, and read, in gold letters on the cover, "Lord Bellasis."

The unhappy young man knelt down beside the body and raised it. The skull had been fractured by a blow, but it seemed that life yet lingered. Overcome with horror—for he could not doubt but that his mother's worst fears had been realized—Richard knelt there holding his murdered father in his arms, waiting until the murderer, whose name he bore, should have placed himself beyond pursuit. It seemed an hour to his excited fancy before he saw a light pass along the front of the house he had quitted, and knew that Sir Richard had safely reached his chamber. With some bewildered intention of summoning aid, he left the body and made towards the town. As he stepped out on the path he heard voices, and presently some dozen men, one of whom held a horse, burst out upon him, and, with sudden fury, seized and flung him to the ground.

At first the young man, so rudely assailed, did not comprehend his own danger. His mind, bent upon one hideous explanation of the crime, did not see another obvious one which had already occurred to the mind of the landlord of the Three Spaniards.

"God defend me!" cried Mr. Mogford, scanning by the pale light of the rising moon the features of the murdered man, "but it is Lord Bellasis!—oh, you bloody villain! Jem, bring him along here, p'r'aps his lordship can recognize him!"

"It was not I!" cried Richard Devine. "For God's sake, my lord say—" then he stopped abruptly, and being forced on his knees by his captors, remained staring at the dying man, in sudden and ghastly fear.

Those men in whom emotion has the effect of quickening circulation of the blood reason rapidly in moments of danger, and in the terrible instant when his eyes met those of Lord Bellasis, Richard Devine had summed up the chances of his future fortune, and realized to the full his personal peril. The runaway horse had given the alarm. The drinkers at the Spaniards' Inn had started to search the Heath, and had discovered a fellow in rough costume, whose person was unknown to them, hastily quitting a spot where, beside a rifled pocket-book and a blood-stained whip, lay a dying man.

The web of circumstantial evidence had enmeshed him. An hour ago escape would have been easy. He would have had but to cry, "I am the son of Sir Richard Devine. Come with me to yonder house, and I will prove to you that I have but just quitted it,"—to place his innocence beyond immediate question. That course of action was impossible now. Knowing Sir Richard as he did, and believing, moreover, that in his raging passion the old man had himself met and murdered the destroyer of his honour, the son of Lord Bellasis and Lady Devine saw himself in a position which would compel him either to sacrifice himself, or to purchase a chance of safety at the price of his mother's dishonour and the death of the man whom his mother had deceived. If the outcast son were brought a prisoner to North End House, Sir Richard—now doubly oppressed of fate—would be certain to deny him; and he would be compelled, in self-defence, to reveal a story which would at once bring his mother to open infamy, and send to the gallows the man who had been for twenty years deceived—the man to whose kindness he owed education and former fortune. He knelt, stupefied, unable to speak or move.

"Come," cried Mogford again; "say, my lord, is this the villain?"

Lord Bellasis rallied his failing senses, his glazing eyes stared into his son's face with horrible eagerness; he shook his head, raised a feeble arm as though to point elsewhere, and fell back dead.

“If you didn't murder him, you robbed him,” growled Mogford, “and you shall sleep at Bow Street to-night. Tom, run on to meet the patrol, and leave word at the Gate-house that I've a passenger for the coach!—Bring him on, Jack!—What's your name, eh?”

He repeated the rough question twice before his prisoner answered, but at length Richard Devine raised a pale face which stern resolution had already hardened into defiant manhood, and said “Dawes—Rufus Dawes.”

His new life had begun already: for that night one, Rufus Dawes, charged with murder and robbery, lay awake in prison, waiting for the fortune of the morrow.

Two other men waited as eagerly. One, Mr. Lionel Crofton; the other, the horseman who had appointment with the murdered Lord Bellasis under the shadow of the fir trees on Hampstead Heath. As for Sir Richard Devine, he waited for no one, for upon reaching his room he had fallen senseless in a fit of apoplexy.

BOOK I.—THE SEA. 1827.

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CHAPTER I. THE PRISON SHIP.

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In the breathless stillness of a tropical afternoon, when the air was hot and heavy, and the sky brazen and cloudless, the shadow of the Malabar lay solitary on the surface of the glittering sea.

The sun—who rose on the left hand every morning a blazing ball, to move slowly through the unbearable blue, until he sank fiery red in mingling glories of sky and ocean on the right hand—had just got low enough to peep beneath the awning that covered the poop-deck, and awaken a young man, in an undress military uniform, who was dozing on a coil of rope.

“Hang it!” said he, rising and stretching himself, with the weary sigh of a man who has nothing to do, “I must have been asleep”; and then, holding by a stay, he turned about and looked down into the waist of the ship.

Save for the man at the wheel and the guard at the quarter-railing, he was alone on the deck. A few birds flew round about the vessel, and seemed to pass under her stern windows only to appear again at her bows. A lazy albatross, with the white water flashing from his wings, rose with a dabbling sound to leeward, and in the place where he had been glided the hideous fin of a silently-swimming shark. The seams of the well-scrubbed deck were sticky with melted pitch, and the brass plate of the compass-case sparkled in the sun like a jewel. There was no breeze, and as the clumsy ship rolled and lurched on the heaving sea, her idle sails flapped against her masts with a regularly recurring noise, and her bowsprit would seem to rise higher with the water's swell, to dip again with a jerk that made

each rope tremble and tauten. On the forecastle, some half-dozen soldiers, in all varieties of undress, were playing at cards, smoking, or watching the fishing-lines hanging over the catheads.

So far the appearance of the vessel differed in no wise from that of an ordinary transport. But in the waist a curious sight presented itself. It was as though one had built a cattle-pen there. At the foot of the foremast, and at the quarter-deck, a strong barricade, loop-holed and furnished with doors for ingress and egress, ran across the deck from bulwark to bulwark. Outside this cattle-pen an armed sentry stood on guard; inside, standing, sitting, or walking monotonously, within range of the shining barrels in the arm chest on the poop, were some sixty men and boys, dressed in uniform grey. The men and boys were prisoners of the Crown, and the cattle-pen was their exercise ground. Their prison was down the main hatchway, on the 'tween decks, and the barricade, continued down, made its side walls.

It was the fag end of the two hours' exercise graciously permitted each afternoon by His Majesty King George the Fourth to prisoners of the Crown, and the prisoners of the Crown were enjoying themselves. It was not, perhaps, so pleasant as under the awning on the poop-deck, but that sacred shade was only for such great men as the captain and his officers, Surgeon Pine, Lieutenant Maurice Frere, and, most important personages of all, Captain Vickers and his wife.

That the convict leaning against the bulwarks would like to have been able to get rid of his enemy the sun for a moment, was probable enough. His companions, sitting on the combings of the main-hatch, or crouched in careless fashion on the shady side of the barricade, were laughing and talking, with blasphemous and obscene merriment hideous to contemplate; but he, with cap pulled over his

brows, and hands thrust into the pockets of his coarse grey garments, held aloof from their dismal joviality.

The sun poured his hottest rays on his head unheeded, and though every cranny and seam in the deck sweltered hot pitch under the fierce heat, the man stood there, motionless and morose, staring at the sleepy sea. He had stood thus, in one place or another, ever since the groaning vessel had escaped from the rollers of the Bay of Biscay, and the miserable hundred and eighty creatures among whom he was classed had been freed from their irons, and allowed to sniff fresh air twice a day.

The low-browed, coarse-featured ruffians grouped about the deck cast many a leer of contempt at the solitary figure, but their remarks were confined to gestures only. There are degrees in crime, and Rufus Dawes, the convicted felon, who had but escaped the gallows to toil for all his life in irons, was a man of mark. He had been tried for the robbery and murder of Lord Bellasis. The friendless vagabond's lame story of finding on the Heath a dying man would not have availed him, but for the curious fact sworn to by the landlord of the Spaniards' Inn, that the murdered nobleman had shaken his head when asked if the prisoner was his assassin. The vagabond was acquitted of the murder, but condemned to death for the robbery, and London, who took some interest in the trial, considered him fortunate when his sentence was commuted to transportation for life.

It was customary on board these floating prisons to keep each man's crime a secret from his fellows, so that if he chose, and the caprice of his gaolers allowed him, he could lead a new life in his adopted home, without being taunted with his former misdeeds. But, like other excellent devices, the expedient was only a nominal one, and few out of the doomed hundred and eighty were ignorant of the offence which their companions had committed. The more guilty boasted of their superiority in vice; the petty criminals

swore that their guilt was blacker than it appeared. Moreover, a deed so bloodthirsty and a respite so unexpected, had invested the name of Rufus Dawes with a grim distinction, which his superior mental abilities, no less than his haughty temper and powerful frame, combined to support. A young man of two-and-twenty owing to no friends, and existing among them but by the fact of his criminality, he was respected and admired. The vilest of all the vile horde penned between decks, if they laughed at his "fine airs" behind his back, cringed and submitted when they met him face to face—for in a convict ship the greatest villain is the greatest hero, and the only nobility acknowledged by that hideous commonwealth is that Order of the Halter which is conferred by the hand of the hangman.

The young man on the poop caught sight of the tall figure leaning against the bulwarks, and it gave him an excuse to break the monotony of his employment.

"Here, you!" he called with an oath, "get out of the gangway!" Rufus Dawes was not in the gangway—was, in fact, a good two feet from it, but at the sound of Lieutenant Frere's voice he started, and went obediently towards the hatchway.

"Touch your hat, you dog!" cries Frere, coming to the quarter-railing. "Touch your damned hat! Do you hear?"

Rufus Dawes touched his cap, saluting in half military fashion. "I'll make some of you fellows smart, if you don't have a care," went on the angry Frere, half to himself. "Insolent blackguards!"

And then the noise of the sentry, on the quarter-deck below him, grounding arms, turned the current of his thoughts. A thin, tall, soldier-like man, with a cold blue eye, and prim features, came out of the cuddy below, handing out a fair-haired, affected, mincing lady, of middle age.

Captain Vickers, of Mr. Frere's regiment, ordered for service in Van Diemen's Land, was bringing his lady on deck to get an appetite for dinner.

Mrs. Vickers was forty-two (she owned to thirty-three), and had been a garrison-belle for eleven weary years before she married prim John Vickers. The marriage was not a happy one. Vickers found his wife extravagant, vain, and snappish, and she found him harsh, disenchanted, and commonplace. A daughter, born two years after their marriage, was the only link that bound the ill-assorted pair. Vickers idolized little Sylvia, and when the recommendation of a long sea-voyage for his failing health induced him to exchange into the—th, he insisted upon bringing the child with him, despite Mrs. Vickers's reiterated objections on the score of educational difficulties. "He could educate her himself, if need be," he said; "and she should not stay at home."

So Mrs. Vickers, after a hard struggle, gave up the point and her dreams of Bath together, and followed her husband with the best grace she could muster. When fairly out to sea she seemed reconciled to her fate, and employed the intervals between scolding her daughter and her maid, in fascinating the boorish young Lieutenant, Maurice Frere.

Fascination was an integral portion of Julia Vickers's nature; admiration was all she lived for: and even in a convict ship, with her husband at her elbow, she must flirt, or perish of mental inanition. There was no harm in the creature. She was simply a vain, middle-aged woman, and Frere took her attentions for what they were worth. Moreover, her good feeling towards him was useful, for reasons which will shortly appear.

Running down the ladder, cap in hand, he offered her his assistance.

"Thank you, Mr. Frere. These horrid ladders. I really—he, he—quite tremble at them. Hot! Yes, dear me, most

oppressive. John, the camp-stool. Pray, Mr. Frere—oh, thank you! Sylvia! Sylvia! John, have you my smelling salts? Still a calm, I suppose? These dreadful calms!”

This semi-fashionable slip-slop, within twenty yards of the wild beasts' den, on the other side of the barricade, sounded strange; but Mr. Frere thought nothing of it. Familiarity destroys terror, and the incurable flirt, fluttered her muslins, and played off her second-rate graces, under the noses of the grinning convicts, with as much complacency as if she had been in a Chatham ball-room. Indeed, if there had been nobody else near, it is not unlikely that she would have disdainfully fascinated the 'tween-decks, and made eyes at the most presentable of the convicts there.

Vickers, with a bow to Frere, saw his wife up the ladder, and then turned for his daughter.

She was a delicate-looking child of six years old, with blue eyes and bright hair. Though indulged by her father, and spoiled by her mother, the natural sweetness of her disposition saved her from being disagreeable, and the effects of her education as yet only showed themselves in a thousand imperious prettinesses, which made her the darling of the ship. Little Miss Sylvia was privileged to go anywhere and do anything, and even convictism shut its foul mouth in her presence. Running to her father's side, the child chattered with all the volubility of flattered self-esteem. She ran hither and thither, asked questions, invented answers, laughed, sang, gambolled, peered into the compass-case, felt in the pockets of the man at the helm, put her tiny hand into the big palm of the officer of the watch, even ran down to the quarter-deck and pulled the coat-tails of the sentry on duty.

At last, tired of running about, she took a little striped leather ball from the bosom of her frock, and calling to her father, threw it up to him as he stood on the poop. He

returned it, and, shouting with laughter, clapping her hands between each throw, the child kept up the game.

The convicts—whose slice of fresh air was nearly eaten—turned with eagerness to watch this new source of amusement. Innocent laughter and childish prattle were strange to them. Some smiled, and nodded with interest in the varying fortunes of the game. One young lad could hardly restrain himself from applauding. It was as though, out of the sultry heat which brooded over the ship, a cool breeze had suddenly arisen.

In the midst of this mirth, the officer of the watch, glancing round the fast crimsoning horizon, paused abruptly, and shading his eyes with his hand, looked out intently to the westward.

Frere, who found Mrs. Vickers's conversation a little tiresome, and had been glancing from time to time at the companion, as though in expectation of someone appearing, noticed the action.

“What is it, Mr. Best?”

“I don't know exactly. It looks to me like a cloud of smoke.” And, taking the glass, he swept the horizon.

“Let me see,” said Frere; and he looked also.

On the extreme horizon, just to the left of the sinking sun, rested, or seemed to rest, a tiny black cloud. The gold and crimson, splashed all about the sky, had overflowed around it, and rendered a clear view almost impossible.

“I can't quite make it out,” says Frere, handing back the telescope. “We can see as soon as the sun goes down a little.”

Then Mrs. Vickers must, of course, look also, and was prettily affected about the focus of the glass, applying herself to that instrument with much girlish giggling, and finally declaring, after shutting one eye with her fair hand,

that positively she “could see nothing but sky, and believed that wicked Mr. Frere was doing it on purpose.”

By and by, Captain Blunt appeared, and, taking the glass from his officer, looked through it long and carefully. Then the mizentop was appealed to, and declared that he could see nothing; and at last the sun went down with a jerk, as though it had slipped through a slit in the sea, and the black spot, swallowed up in the gathering haze, was seen no more.

As the sun sank, the relief guard came up the after hatchway, and the relieved guard prepared to superintend the descent of the convicts. At this moment Sylvia missed her ball, which, taking advantage of a sudden lurch of the vessel, hopped over the barricade, and rolled to the feet of Rufus Dawes, who was still leaning, apparently lost in thought, against the side.

The bright spot of colour rolling across the white deck caught his eye; stooping mechanically, he picked up the ball, and stepped forward to return it. The door of the barricade was open and the sentry—a young soldier, occupied in staring at the relief guard—did not notice the prisoner pass through it. In another instant he was on the sacred quarter-deck.

Heated with the game, her cheeks aglow, her eyes sparkling, her golden hair afloat, Sylvia had turned to leap after her plaything, but even as she turned, from under the shadow of the cuddy glided a rounded white arm; and a shapely hand caught the child by the sash and drew her back. The next moment the young man in grey had placed the toy in her hand.

Maurice Frere, descending the poop ladder, had not witnessed this little incident; on reaching the deck, he saw only the unexplained presence of the convict uniform.

“Thank you,” said a voice, as Rufus Dawes stooped before the pouting Sylvia.

The convict raised his eyes and saw a young girl of eighteen or nineteen years of age, tall, and well developed, who, dressed in a loose-sleeved robe of some white material, was standing in the doorway. She had black hair, coiled around a narrow and flat head, a small foot, white skin, well-shaped hands, and large dark eyes, and as she smiled at him, her scarlet lips showed her white even teeth.

He knew her at once. She was Sarah Purfoy, Mrs. Vickers's maid, but he never had been so close to her before; and it seemed to him that he was in the presence of some strange tropical flower, which exhaled a heavy and intoxicating perfume.

For an instant the two looked at each other, and then Rufus Dawes was seized from behind by his collar, and flung with a shock upon the deck.

Leaping to his feet, his first impulse was to rush upon his assailant, but he saw the ready bayonet of the sentry gleam, and he checked himself with an effort, for his assailant was Mr. Maurice Frere.

“What the devil do you do here?” asked the gentleman with an oath. “You lazy, skulking hound, what brings you here? If I catch you putting your foot on the quarter-deck again, I'll give you a week in irons!”

Rufus Dawes, pale with rage and mortification, opened his mouth to justify himself, but he allowed the words to die on his lips. What was the use? “Go down below, and remember what I've told you,” cried Frere; and comprehending at once what had occurred, he made a mental minute of the name of the defaulting sentry.

The convict, wiping the blood from his face, turned on his heel without a word, and went back through the strong oak door into his den. Frere leant forward and took the girl's

shapely hand with an easy gesture, but she drew it away, with a flash of her black eyes.

“You coward!” she said.

The stolid soldier close beside them heard it, and his eye twinkled. Frere bit his thick lips with mortification, as he followed the girl into the cuddy. Sarah Purfoy, however, taking the astonished Sylvia by the hand, glided into her mistress's cabin with a scornful laugh, and shut the door behind her.