

E. F. KNIGHT



**A DESPERATE
VOYAGE**

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CHAPTER I

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In Carey Street, Chancery Lane, on the ground floor of a huge block of new buildings facing the Law Courts, were the offices of Messrs. Peters and Carew, solicitors and perpetual commissioners of oaths. Such was the title of the firm as inscribed on the side of the entrance door in the middle of a long list of other names of solicitors, architects, and companies, whose offices were within. But the firm was now represented by Mr. Carew alone; for the senior partner, a steady-going old gentleman, who had made the business what it was, had been despatched by an attack of gout, two years back, to a land where there is no litigation.

Late one August evening Mr. Henry Carew entered his office. His face was white and haggard, and he muttered to himself as he passed the door. He had all the appearance of a man who has been drinking heavily to drown some terrible worry. His clerks had gone; he went into his own private room and locked the door. He lit the gas, brought a pile of papers and letters out of a drawer, and, sitting down by the table, commenced to peruse them. As he did so, the lines about his face seemed to deepen, and beads of perspiration started to his forehead. It was for him an hour of agony. His sins had found him out, and the day of reckoning had arrived.

One might have taken Henry Carew for a sailor, but he was very unlike the typical solicitor. He was a big, hearty man of thirty-five, with all a sailor's bluff manner and generous ways. His friends called him Honest Hal, and said

that he was one of the best fellows that ever lived. We have it on the authority of that immortal adventuress, Becky Sharp, that it is easy to be virtuous on five thousand a year. Had Mr. Carew enjoyed such an income, he would most probably have lived a blameless life and have acquired an estimable reputation; for he had no instinctive liking for crime; on the contrary, he loathed it.

But one slight moral flaw in a man's nature—so slight that his best friends smile tolerantly at it—may, by force of circumstance, lead ultimately to his complete moral ruin. It is an old story, and has been the text of many a sermon. The trifling fault is often the germ of terrible crimes.

Carew's fault was one that is always easily condoned, so nearly akin is it to a virtue; these respectably connected vices are ever the most dangerous, like well-born swindlers. Carew was a spendthrift. He was ostentatiously extravagant in many directions. He owned a smart schooner, which he navigated himself, being an excellent sailor, and the quantities of champagne consumed by his friends on board this vessel were prodigious.

When his steady old partner died, Carew began to neglect the business for his pleasures. Soon his income was insufficient to meet his expenses. Speculation on the Stock Exchange seemed to him to be a quicker road to fortune than a slow-going profession. So this man, morally weak though physically brave, not having the courage to curtail his extravagances, hurried blindly to his destruction. He gambled and lost all his own property; for ill-luck ever pursued him. Even then it was not too late to redeem his position. But he was too great a coward to look his

difficulties in the face; therefore, having the temptation to commit so terribly easy a crime ever before him in his office, he began—first, timidly, to a small extent; then wildly, in panic, in order to retrieve his losses—to speculate with the moneys entrusted to him by his clients. He pawned their securities; he forged their names; he plunged ever deeper into crime—and all in vain.

When it was too late, he swore to himself, in the torments of his remorse, that if he could but once win back sufficient to replace the sums he had stolen, he would cut down all his expenses, forswear gambling and dishonesty, and stick to his profession.

At last it came to this. He sold his yacht and everything else he possessed of value. He realised what remained of the securities under his charge, and then placed the entire sum as cover on a certain stock, the price of which, he was told, was certain to rise. It was the gambler's last despairing throw of the dice. The stock suddenly fell; settling day arrived, and his cover was swept away—he had lost all!

So he sat in his office this night and faced the situation in an agony of spirit that was more than fear. For this was no unscrupulous, light-hearted villain. An accusing conscience was ever with him, and every fresh descent in crime meant for him a worse present hell of mental torture.

He felt that it was idle to hope now, even for a short reprieve. Clients were suspicious. In a day or two at most all must be known. Disgrace and a felon's doom were staring him in the face. It would be impossible for him to raise even sufficient funds to escape from England to some country where extradition treaties were unknown. Carew realised all

this. He had forced himself to look through his papers and discover the total of his liabilities. It was a sum he could by no effort refund.

He laughed aloud—a savage, discordant laugh, as might be that of some lost soul.

"Yes, it is all over," he thought; "I throw up the cards. But I will not endure the disgrace of a public trial, the ignominy of a convict's life; and after that to come out of jail with my soul eaten out by long years of penal servitude, with the brand of a felon on my name. Oh no—not that! After all, a man has always one last privilege left him; he holds in his own hands the power of terminating his own miserable existence. Yes; I will kill myself, and have done with it all!"

In the contemplation of suicide he became calmer. Now that he had determined on death, his terrible anxiety left him, and the heroism of despair supported him.

"I feel a peace of mind at this moment such as has not come to me for many wretched months," he said to himself. "There is almost a pleasure in knowing that one has got to the bottom of one's cup of suffering, that there can be nothing worse to come."

He meditated quietly for some time as to how he should take away his life. At last he came to a decision, and a strange smile lit up his face. "Yes, that is an admirable plan; now for the means of carrying it out. First, I must have a sovereign or so. I can pawn my watch. Now for the ballast." He glanced round the room. "Yes, that will do." He rose and collected several heavy leaden paperweights from the different desks in the offices and put them into his pockets. "That will be sufficient. Now I will go to Brighton. It is a

glorious evening. I will smell the sea-air once more. I will have a last dinner at an hotel; and then at night, when the tide is high, I will throw myself off the pier; this weight of lead will keep me down. And the next morning my creditors may seize my body: they are welcome to it."

At that moment a loud knock came at the outer door. He turned pale and nearly fainted at the sound. Was he to be balked of those last few hours of freedom which he had promised himself? Were these the officers of justice who had come to apprehend him? Once more the dew of agony burst out on his brow; he groaned aloud; then, summoning resolution, the desperate man approached the door.

But it was only the postman, after all. "Idiot that I am not to have known the knock! but my brain swims to-night. A letter for me. What is this?"

He read the letter slowly through; then he put his hand to his forehead. A revulsion of feeling had suddenly come to him that confused and stunned him. "Oh, merciful Heaven!" he said, "is this but a cruel trick of Fortune to tempt me with a vain hope? I had quite reconciled myself to death—and now this comes. Perhaps it is but a short reprieve, and its price will be all that agonising suspense again. No, let me die; and yet"—he glanced at the letter again—"surely I have here a means of escape. If I can but collect my scattered wits and recover my cunning, I can save myself. I can live, but it will mean crime again—always crime! Oh, is it worth it?"

After a painful mental struggle, he came to a determination. "Yes, I will live," he said.

The letter was as follows:—

"DEAR CAREW,—You have often promised to cruise with me in my boat. I am off to-morrow for Holland. Can you join me? Come and look me up to-night, and arrange it all.—Yours sincerely,

"ARTHUR ALLEN."

CHAPTER II

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Arthur Allen, barrister-at-law, was of about the same age as his friend Carew; a man possessed of private means sufficient for his needs, into whose chambers so few briefs found their way that he had for some years dispensed with the services of a clerk. But, as one would have surmised after glancing at the strong, intelligent face, he was a man by no means lacking in energy, and not of idle disposition: as a matter of fact, a scholar, and one who had taken high honours at his university, he still maintained his studious habits, and, having practically abandoned a profession that was uncongenial to him, he devoted himself to literary pursuits; and his thoughtful articles in the reviews and in the newspaper to which he was attached brought him in no insignificant addition to his income.

No mere bookworm, he had been an athlete in his youth; but now his one outdoor form of amusement was the sailing of his little yacht, on which, always acting as his own skipper, he had taken many a delightful cruise in home and distant waters. He was an enthusiastic lover of the sea. This was the one taste he had in common with Carew. It was at some yacht club, of which they were both members, that they had become acquainted.

It was a lovely August evening. The windows of Allen's bachelor chambers in the Temple were open, and through them could be seen that fair oasis of London's desert of bricks and mortar, Fountain Court, with its stately buildings, ancient trees, and quiet garden with splashing fountains in

its midst. Nor was the view confined; for, beyond the chapel and the green, could be perceived the broad, gleaming Thames, and the distant Surrey shore, glorified by a faint mist; a peaceful, old-world spot, with a contemplative air about it, for it is haunted by the memories of much departed greatness. Allen was reclining in a comfortable arm-chair, drawn up to the open window, in whose recesses geraniums bloomed, their vivid blossoms occasionally shaking beneath the breath of the soft south wind that had come directly from the cool river.

He smoked his pipe as he looked out upon the sweet sunset scene, his mind happily occupied in planning his coming cruise, when his meditations were interrupted by a knock at the outer door. He rose to admit his visitor, opened the door, and there stood before him Henry Carew in serge suit and yachting cap, a small Gladstone bag in his hand.

"Hallo, Carew, old man! you have not been long replying to my letter. I was afraid you would have left the office before it reached you. Come in."

"Are you alone?" inquired Carew, in a low voice.

"Yes, quite alone. I am smoking a pipe of peace by myself. You have just come at the right time."

They entered the room, and then, as the light of the sunset fell upon the solicitor's face, Allen perceived its haggard expression.

"How queer you look, Carew!" he exclaimed. "Are you ill?"

"Ill—no, not at all; but worried—worried almost out of my life," replied Carew wildly, throwing himself into a chair, and putting his face between his hands.

Allen sat in a chair opposite to him, refilled and lit his pipe, and, as he smoked, gazed at his friend with feelings of perplexed compassion.

"Have a pipe, old fellow; there is nothing like a pipe for worry."

"A pipe?" cried Carew, with contemptuous bitterness.
"No; but have you some brandy? Give me some brandy."

"Certainly, Carew," and the barrister produced a spirit-case, some glasses, and water.

Carew poured a quantity of spirit into a glass and drank it neat. He was usually a temperate man.

"That is not the way to clear one's brain for confronting one's troubles," remarked Allen.

"No, you are right. It is foolish of me. Allen, I have come to say that I shall be very glad to accompany you on your cruise."

"I am delighted to hear that. A good blow in the North Sea will do you good, if your mind is so upset."

"Allen," said Carew, pulling himself together and speaking with more self-possession, "I wish I could speak to you of the business that is troubling me, but I am not at liberty to do so. It concerns others."

"I don't want to know anything about it, old man; but I am sure you will soon get out of your trouble, whatever it is. With an easy conscience no man is miserable for long. And now that I have secured you as a hand, I have a sufficient crew. So we will start to-morrow morning. Will you be ready by then?"

"I am ready now. You see I have brought my baggage with me."

"Then, as we have to catch an early train to-morrow, you had better sleep to-night in my chambers; I can put you up. Our destination is the Dutch coast, old man, and we should have a jolly time of it. You have not yet seen my new boat, the *Petrel*—a yawl of twenty-eight tons, yacht measurement; a splendid sea-boat. I would go anywhere in her. She is now lying off Erith."

Carew had been listening attentively. "What crew do you carry?" he asked.

"Ah, let me tell you that you will have lots of work to do. We shall be but three all told. I have shipped one hand only—Jim, the fisherman, who was with me last year. Another friend was coming with me, but he has disappointed me."

"For how long will you be away?"

"About a fortnight. I have been a bit fagged of late, and want a holiday. I only made up my mind to take this cruise this afternoon. Not a soul but yourself knows we are going."

On hearing this a sigh of relief escaped Carew. Yes, if he were once on board the yacht all trace of him would be lost. He felt almost jubilant as he thought of it; the recent acute tension of his mind had left a sort of hysterical weakness behind, and he alternated easily between exultant hope and profoundest despair.

He reflected that if he could but contrive to reach Erith without being observed by any who knew him, he was safe, at anyrate for some time. But how to do so? It was possible that even already detectives had been set to watch his movements. He must take his chance of that, use all his wits, and incur no risk that could be avoided. Fearing to show himself in the streets, more especially in the Strand or

Fleet Street, where so many would know him by sight at least, he suggested to Allen that they should send to a neighbouring chop-house for their dinners, and remain quietly in the chambers, instead of dining, as was their wont, at a club. The barrister agreed to this, and therefore had no opportunity that night of meeting any of his friends, and he communicated to no one his intention of sailing on the morrow. He merely left a note for his housekeeper on his table, informing her that he would be out of town for a fortnight, and that his letters were not to be forwarded.

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At an early hour on the following morning a cab was brought round to the door of the barrister's chambers, and the two friends drove off to Charing Cross Station, arriving there but a few minutes before their train started. The chances of anyone who knew him recognising Carew on the way were thus reduced to a minimum. At Erith Allen's man, Jim, was awaiting them with the dinghy. He was a very broad-shouldered, florid-faced man of forty, with a protuberance in one cheek indicating the presence of a quid. He looked exactly what he was—a hardy, North-Sea smackman.

Jim pulled them off to the yacht, and when the solicitor, who was thoroughly at home on a boat, a keen lover of the sea, with yachting as his one innocent pleasure, stood on the white deck, and, looking around, saw how glorious was that summer's day, beheld the river sparkling in the sunshine, thronged with stately ships and picturesque

barges tacking up with the flood against the soft south-west wind, a delightful sense of freedom rushed upon him.

Oh, what a thing it was to have left behind him that accursed city, with its weariness, its anxieties, the endless jangles of the law, the feverish play, the guilt, the terrible dread of detection—to have left it for ever!

"Now, Jim, off we go!" cried the skipper. The dinghy was lifted on board, the mainsail was hoisted, then the jib; the moorings were slipt, up went the foresail, and the yacht shot out into the stream; then, obedient to her rudder, bore away, and tore down the river before the freshening breeze on the top of the strong ebb tide. Needless it is to describe that pleasant summer day's sail. Allen was in the highest spirits, and for him the happy hours flew rapidly by. Even Carew, intoxicated with the pure air and sunshine, and the delightful sight of dancing waters, forgot his sin and misery, and felt almost light-hearted for the first time for months; and at last, when the yacht reached the broader water, thinking over his position, he gave a sigh of infinite relief. Now, indeed, he was safe. No fugitive had ever left so little trace behind him.

They were well outside the Thames, in the East Swin Channel, before dark. The sun set in a golden haze, ominous of storm on the morrow, and then the wind dropped. The yacht sailed very slowly down the English coast during the night, the three men taking it in turn to steer and sleep. At sunrise they were off the Naze, and the sky looked so stormy and the glass fell so rapidly that there was some discussion as to whether it would not be well to put in to Harwich. But Carew was so earnestly opposed to this that

the owner decided to push on, and the vessel's head was turned seaward towards the mouth of the Maas. The English coast loomed less and less distinct; but so light was the wind that it was not till midday that they lost all sight of the land. Then the wind began to pipe up suddenly, and seeing nothing but stormy clouds and heaving water around him, Carew's spirits rose wonderfully; a reaction of wild gaiety succeeded his anxiety.

At four it was blowing so hard that they took two reefs in the mainsail and shifted jibs. Shortly before sunset, Carew was taking his turn at the tiller; the others were below. After a while the motion of the yacht became so violent that the owner came on deck to have a look round.

"The wind has freshened a lot this last half-hour, and there's a nasty sea getting up," he said. "It will be blowing a gale of wind before the morning. Well, we have a good craft under our feet."

"She steers wonderfully easily," replied the solicitor. "She's a beautiful boat. I would not mind crossing the Atlantic in her."

"I should think not," said the proud owner. "But look at that vessel across your lee-bow, Carew. What the dickens are they up to on board of her? She's yawning all over the place. First I thought she was on the port-tack; then she seemed as if she was in stays; and now—ah, I see it—she is hove-to."

"She is a small brig," said Carew. "Get the glasses up and see what you can make of her."

Allen dived below, brought up the binoculars, and scanned the vessel. "By Jove!" he cried, "she's in a nice

mess. Her bowsprit is carried away, her foretopmast too, and her jib's streaming away like a flag. Hallo! and part of her stem and bulwarks have gone."

"Collision." It was Jim's voice. He had just come on deck, and his quick eye at once realised the brig's mishap. Then he looked at her intently for some moments, and spoke again, in eager tones for him—

"Derelict."

"So she is," cried Allen. "We'll get out the boat and board her. Do you think the sea is too high, Jim?"

Jim said nothing. He was quite ready to risk his life in a cockle-shell in a heavy sea, as all fishermen of the Doggerbank must be. He was not the man to refuse to do what his employer wished, unless the danger were very great indeed. He looked round at the sea, then nodded his head affirmatively.

"I don't think it's safe," said Carew. "In the first place, see how low that brig is in the water; she may go down at any moment, and the sea is very tricky to-day. I grant you it does not seem so very rough just now, but every half-hour or so there have been some rather dangerous rollers. One passed by us just before you came on deck."

But Allen's spirit of adventure was up. "Oh, nonsense!" he cried; "I'm going to see what she is. She may be worth standing by for salvage. Run down a bit nearer to her—that's it. Now let's heave-to—so. Now overboard with the dinghy, Jim. You stay behind and mind the yacht, Carew."

Jim and Allen waited for a "smooth," seized the dinghy, dexterously launched her, and leaping in nimbly, pulled

away from the yacht—a feat that looks easy on paper, but requires nerve and skill to perform in a heavy sea.

"If you drift away too far, let draw your jib and sail up to us," shouted Allen, as he went away.

Carew stood on the deck of the yacht, which now rose and fell on the seas with the easy motion of a vessel that is hove-to, and watched the tiny boat, so frail and yet so buoyant, so far safer than she seemed, as she leapt from wave to wave.

The dinghy was close to the brig. In another moment the men would have boarded her, when Carew perceived, to his horror, a huge roller coming up—a steep mass of water, with overhanging, breaking crest, such as are met with on the edge of shallows. It reached the yacht and hurled her high up; then dropped her again into the trough of the sea with a shock almost as violent as if she had struck a rock. The giant wave thundered by the sturdy little vessel without injuring her. But the dinghy—where was she?

Carew strained his eyes in her direction. First the boat was hidden from him by the intervening wave; then he saw her for a moment floating on the top of a sea, some forty yards away, bottom up. He thought, too, he could distinguish a man's head in the water near her. The derelict had disappeared. Waterlogged as she was, it had only needed that last great sea to send her down bodily.

But all this while his two companions were drowning. Why did Carew stand there idle? He was sailor enough to know his duty. He could have sailed the yacht close to the men, thrown a life-buoy to them, and have possibly succeeded in dragging them on board. He stood on the