

For The Term of His Natural Life

By MARCUS CLARKE

CHAPTER IX.

It was 8 o'clock, and the relief guard was coming from the after deck. The crowd of prisoners round the door held their breath to listen.

"It's all planned," says Gabbett, in a low growl. "When the door opens we rush, and we're in among the guard afore they know where they are. Drag 'em back into the prison, grab the harm rack, and it's all over."

"Stand from the door, Miles," says Pine's voice outside, in its usual calm accents.

The Crow was relieved. The tone was an ordinary one, and Miles was the soldier whom Sarah Purfoy had bribed not to fire. All had gone well.

The keys clashed and turned, and the bravest of the prudent party, who had been turning in his mind the notion of risking his life for a pardon to be won by rushing forward at the right moment and alarming the guard, checked the cry that was in his throat as he saw the men round the door draw back a little for their rash, and caught a glimpse of the giant's bristling scalp and bared gums.

"Now!" cries Jemmy Vetch, as the iron-plated oak swung back, and, with the guttural snarl of a charging wild boar, Gabbett hurled himself out of the prison.

The red line of light which glowed for an instant through the doorway was blotted out by a mass of figures. All the prison surged forward, and before the eye could wink, five, ten, twenty of the most desperate were outside. It was as though a sea, breaking against a stone wall, had found some breach through which to pour its waters. The contagion of battle spread. Caution was forgotten, and those at the back, seeing Jemmy Vetch raised up on the crest of that human billow which reared its black outline against an indistinct perspective of struggling figures, responded to his grin of encouragement by rushing furiously forward.

Suddenly a horrible roar like that of a trapped wild beast was heard. The rushing torrent choked in the doorway, and from out the lantern glowed into which the giant had rushed a flash broke, followed by a groan, as the perfidious sentry fell back, shot through the breast. The mass in the doorway hung irresolute, and then, by sheer weight of pressure from behind, burst forward, and as it so burst, the heavy door crashed into its jams, and the bolts were shot into their places.

All this took place by one of those simultaneous movements which are so rapid in execution, so tedious to describe in detail. At one instant the prison door had opened, at the next it had closed. The picture which had presented itself to the eyes of the convicts was momentary. The period of time that had elapsed between the opening and the shutting of the door could have been marked by the musket shot.

The report of another shot, and then a noise of confused cries, mingled with the clashing of arms, informed the imprisoned men that the ship had been alarmed. How would it go with their friends on deck? Would they succeed in overcoming the guards, or would they be beaten back? They would soon know; and in the hot dust, straining their eyes to see each other, they waited for the issue. Suddenly the noises ceased, and a strange rumbling sound fell upon the ears of the listeners.

What had taken place? This, the men pouring out of the darkness into the sudden glare of the lanterns, rushed, bewildered, across the deck. Miles, true to his promise, did not fire, but the next instant Vickers had snatched the fire-lock from him, and, leaping into the stream, turned about and fired down toward the prison. The attack was more sudden than he had expected, but he did not lose his presence of mind. The shot would serve a double purpose. It would warn the men in the barrack, and perhaps check the rush by stopping up the doorway with a corpse. Beaten back, struggling and indignant, amidst the storm of hideous faces, his humanity vanished, and he aimed deliberately at the head of Mr. James Vetch; the shot, however, missed its mark, and killed the unhappy Miles.

Gabbett and his companions had by this time reached the foot of the companion ladder, there to encounter the cutlasses of the doubled guard gleaming redly in the glow of the lanterns. A glance up the hatchway showed the giant that the arms he had planned to seize were defended by ten firelocks, and that, behind the open doors of the partition which ran about the mizzenmast, the remainder of the detachment stood to their arms. Even his dull intellect comprehended that the desperate project had failed, and that he had been betrayed. With the roar of despair which had penetrated into the prison, he turned to fight his way back, just in time to see the crowd in the gangway recoil from the flash of the musket fired by Vickers. The next instant Pine and two soldiers, taking advantage of the momentary cessation of the press, shot the bolts and secured the prison.

The mutineers were caught in a trap. The narrow space between the barracks and the barricade was choked with struggling figures. Some twenty convicts, and half as many soldiers, struck and stabbed at each other in the crowd. There was barely elbow room, and attacked and attackers fought almost without knowing whom they struck. Gabbett tore a cutlass from a soldier, shook his huge head, and calling on the Mooch-

er to follow, bounded up the ladder, desperately determined to brave the fire of the watch. The Moocher, close at the giant's heels, flung himself upon the nearest soldier, and, grasping his wrist, struggled for the cutlass. A brawny, bull-necked fellow next him dashed his clinched fist into the soldier's face, and the man, maddened by the blow, let go the cutlass, and, drawing his pistol, shot his new assailant through the head. It was this second shot that aroused Maurice Frere.

As the young lieutenant sprang out upon the deck, he saw by the position of the guard that others had been more mindful of the safety of the ship than he. There was, however, no time for explanation, for, as he reached the hatchway, he was met by the ascending giant, who uttered a hideous cry at the sight of this unexpected adversary, and, too close to strike him, locked him in his arms. The two men went down together. The guard on the quarter-deck dared not fire at the two bodies that, twined about each other, rolled across the deck, and for a moment Mr. Frere's cherished existence hung upon the slenderest thread imaginable.

The Moocher, spattered with the blood and brains of his unfortunate comrade, had already set his foot upon the lowest step of the ladder, when the cutlass was dashed from his hand by a blow from a clubbed firelock, and he was dragged roughly backward. As he fell upon the deck, he saw the Crow spring out of the mass of prisoners who had been, an instant before, struggling with the guard, and, gaining the cleared space at the bottom of the ladder, hold up his hands, as though to shield himself from a blow. The confusion had become suddenly stilled, and upon the group before the barricade had fallen that mysterious silence which had perplexed the inmates of the prison.

They were not perplexed for long. The two soldiers who, with the assistance of Pine, had forced to the door of the prison, rapidly unbolted a trap door in the barricade and, at a signal from Vickers, three men ran the loaded howitzer from its sinister shelter, and, training the deadly muzzle to a level with the opening in the barricade, stood ready to fire.

"Surrender!" cried Vickers, in a voice from which all "humanity" had vanished. "Surrender, and give up your ring-leaders, or I'll blow you to pieces!"

There was no tremor in his voice, and though he stood, with Pine by his side, at the very mouth of the leveled cannon, the mutineers perceived, with that acuteness which imminent danger brings to the most stolid of brains, that did they hesitate an instant, he would keep his word. There was an awful moment of silence, broken only by a skurrying noise in the prison, as though a family of rats, disturbed at a flour cask, were scampering to the ship's side for shelter.

The entrapped men looked up the hatchway, but the guard had already closed in upon it, and some of the ship's crew were peering down upon them. Escape was hopeless.

"One minute!" cried Vickers, confident that one second would be enough—"one minute to go quietly, or—"

"Surrender, mates!" shrieked some unknown wretch from out of the darkness of the prison. "Do you want to be the death of us?"

Jemmy Vetch feeling, by that curious sympathy which nervous natures possess, that his comrades wished him to act as spokesman, raised his shrill tones. "We surrender," he said. "It's no use getting our brains blown out." And, raising his hands, he obeyed the motion of Vickers' finger, and led the way toward the barrack.

"Bring the irons forward there!" shouted Vickers, hastening from his perilous position; and before the last man had fled past the still smoking match, the clink of hammers announced that the Crow had resumed those fetters which had been knocked off his dainty limbs a month previously in the Bay of Biscay. In another moment the trap door was closed, the howitzer rumbled back to its clearings, and the prison breathed again.

In the meantime, a scene almost as exciting had taken place on the upper deck. Gabbett, with the blind fury which the consciousness of failure brings to such brute-like natures, had seized Frere by the throat, determined to put an end to at least one of his enemies. But desperate though he was, and with all the advantage of weight and strength upon his side, he found the young lieutenant a more formidable adversary than he had anticipated.

Maurice Frere was no coward. Taken by surprise as he was, he did not lose his presence of mind. The convict was so close upon him that there was no time to strike, but, as he was forced backward, he succeeded in crooking his arm and thrust one hand into his collar. Over and over they rolled, the bewildered sentry not daring to fire, until the ship's side brought them up with violent jerk, and Frere realized that Gabbett was below him. Pressing with all the might of his muscles, he strove to resist the leverage which the giant was applying to turn him over, but he might as well have pushed against a stone wall. With his eyes protruding, and every sinew strained to its utmost, he was slowly forced round, he felt Gabbett releasing his grasp, in order to draw back and aim at him an effectual blow. Disengaging his left hand, Frere suddenly allowed himself to sink, and then drawing up his right knee, struck Gabbett beneath the jaw, and, as the huge head

was forced backward by the blow, dashed his fist into the brawny throat. The giant reeled backward, and, falling on his hands and knees, was in an instant surrounded by sailors.

Authority was almost instantly triumphant on the upper and lower decks. The mutiny was over.

CHAPTER X.

A shock was felt all through the vessel, and Pine, who had been watching the ironing of the last of the mutineers, at once divined its cause.

"Thank God!" he cried, "there's a breeze at last!" And as the overpowered Gabbett, bruised, bleeding and bound, was dragged down the hatchway, the triumphant doctor hurried upon deck to find the Malabar plunging through the whitening water under the influence of a fifteen-knot breeze.

"Stand by to reef topsails. Away aloft, men, and furl the royals!" cries Best from the quarter-deck; and in the midst of the cheery confusion Maurice Frere briefly recapitulated what had taken place, taking care, however, to pass over his own dereliction of duty as rapidly as possible.

Pine knit his brows. "Do you think that Sarah Purfoy was in the plot?" he asked.

"Not she!" says Frere, eager to avert inquiry. "How could she be? Plot! She's sickening of fever, or I'm much mistaken."

Sure enough, they found Sarah Purfoy lying where she had fallen a quarter of an hour before. The clashing of the cutlasses and the firing of muskets had not roused her.

"We must make a sick bay somewhere," says Pine, looking at the senseless figure, with no kindly glance; "though I don't think she's likely to be very bad. Confound her—I believe she's the cause of all this. I'll find out, too, before many hours are over; for I've told those fellows that, unless they confess all about it before to-morrow morning, I'll get them six dozen apiece the day after we anchor in Hobart Town. I've a great mind to do it before we get there. Take her head, Frere, and we'll get her out of this before Vickers comes up. What a fool you are, to be sure! I knew what it would be, with women on board ship. I wonder Mrs. V. has'nt been out before now. There—steady past the door. Make haste, now, before that little Parson comes. Parsons are regular old women to chatter!" and thus muttering, Pine assisted to carry Mrs. Vickers' maid into her cabin.

"I don't wonder at you making a fool of yourself. Chances are you've caught the fever, though this breeze will help to blow it out of us. Blunt, too!"

"What do you mean?" asked Frere, hastily, as he heard a step approach. "What has Blunt to say about her?"

"Why, man, she was making eyes at every man on the ship! I caught her kissing a soldier once."

Maurice Frere's cheeks grew hot. All the time he had flattered himself that he was fascinating the black-eyed maid, the black-eyed maid had been twisting him round her finger, and perhaps imitating his love-making for the gratification of her soldier lover. It was not a pleasant thought; and yet, strange to say, the idea of Sarah's treachery did not make him dislike her. There is a sort of love which thrives under ill-treatment.

Vickers met them at the door. "Pine, Blunt has the fever. Mr. Best found him in his cabin groaning. Come and look at him."

The commander of the Malabar was lying on his bunk in the betwisted condition into which men who sleep in their clothes contrive to get themselves. The doctor shook him, bent down over him, and then loosened his collar. "He's not sick. Halloo!" says Pine, smelling at the broken tumbler, "what's this? Smells queer. Laudanum! He's been hoaxed!"

"Nonsense!"

"I see it," slapping his thigh. "It's that woman! She's drugged him, and meant to do the same for—"(Frere gave him an imploring look—"for anybody else who would be fool enough to let her do it. Dawes was right, sir. She's in it; I'll swear she's in it.")

"What! my wife's maid? Nonsense!" said Vickers.

"It's no nonsense. That soldier who was shot—what's his name?—Miles, he—but, however, it doesn't matter. It's all over now."

"The men will confess before morning," says Vickers, "and we'll see." And he went off to his wife's cabin.

His wife opened the door for him. She had been sitting by the child's bedside, listening to the firing, and waiting for her husband's return, without a murmur. Flirt, fribble, and shrew as she was, Julia Vickers had displayed, in cases of emergency, that glowing courage which women of her nature at times possess. Though she would yawn over any book above the level of a genteel love story; attempt to fascinate, with ludicrous assumption of girlishness, boys young enough to be her sons; shudder at a frog, and scream at a spider, she could sit throughout a quarter of an hour of such suspense as she had just undergone with as much courage as if she had been the strongest minded woman that ever denied her sex. "Is it all over?" she asked.

"Yes, thank God!" said Vickers, pausing on the threshold. "All is safe now, though we had a narrow escape, I believe. How's Sylvia?"

The child was lying on the bed, with her fair hair scattered over the pillow, and her tiny hands moving restlessly to and fro.

"A little better, I think, though she has been talking a good deal."
(To be continued.)

In Manchuria, Siberia and North China much use is made of Chinese brick tea, not as a beverage, but as a vegetable, boiled with rice and mutton.

Spring Humors

Impure or effete matters accumulated in the blood during the winter cause in the spring such disfiguring and painful troubles as boils, pimples, and other eruptions, also weakness, loss of appetite and that tired feeling.

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Broken and Mended.

On swept the little red automobile that was built for two.

"You—you seem so quiet," whispered the beautiful girl, anxiously. "Is there anything about this machine that is broken?"

"Yes," hissed the tall man at her side, bitterly. "My heart."

Feeling remorseful at having jilted him so cruelly the beautiful girl leaned over and added:

"Cheer up, George! If your heart is really broken we can stop at a repair shop."

"Nonsense! What kind of a repair shop could mend a broken heart?"

"Why, the parsonage, George!"

Twenty minutes later the "repair shop" was reached.

As It Often Happens.

When our hero did his courting in the golden long ago.

He declared that her small fingers never real toil should know.

He'd protect those dainty digits; he would labor like a Turk.

And he'd never, never let her do a thing that smacked of work.

For some six or seven winters have the twin been married now.

But throughout them all our hero has been faithful to his vow.

True, he lets her tend the furnace, lets her carry in the coal,

But no real work. Good gracious! That would jar his tender soul.

—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Narrow Escape.

"My baby," said the husband of a prominent club and society woman, "had a narrow escape yesterday."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the friend of the family. "How was that?"

"The nurse girl thoughtlessly left it alone with its mother for nearly an hour," explained the husband and father.

Juvenile Shrewdness.

Kitty called up her father by telephone. "Hello, papa!"

"What is it, dear?" he asked.

"I wish you'd bring me some c-a-n-d-y when you come home this evening."

"All right, Kitty; but why do you spell it out?"

"I don't want anybody else to know what I'm saving."

The wealth of Norway lies almost entirely in her forests and fisheries.

According to Signs.

An Irishman was walking along a road beside a golf links when he was suddenly struck between the shoulders by a golf ball. The force of the blow, says a writer in the New York World, almost knocked him down. When he recovered he observed a golfer running toward him.

"Are you hurt?" asked the player. "Why didn't you get out of the way?"

"An' why should I get out of the way?" asked Pat. "I didn't know there were any assassins round here."

"But I called 'fore,'" said the player, "and when I say 'fore,' that is a sign for you to get out of the way."

"Oh, it is, is it?" said Pat. "Well, thin, when I say 'foive,' it is a sign that you are going to get hit on the nose. 'Foive.'"

Czar's Wealth in Forests.

Few people who have not traveled about the Russian empire can imagine how boundless is its wealth in timber. "Wooden Russia" is the name applied to the vast forest areas of Russia in Europe, which cover nearly 5,000,000 acres, or 36 per cent of the entire area of the country. In Russia houses built of any other material than wood are almost unknown outside the cities and wood constitutes the principal fuel. The forest belt called the "Taiga," in Siberia, stretches in a direct line from the Urals to the Pacific for 4,000 miles and in many parts is 500 miles broad. All this is the property of the czar.

His Only Concern.

"John," whispered his wife, shaking him, "I hear somebody in the basement."

John groped his way, half awake, to the wall, and bawled down the register.

"You infernal scoundrel," he said, "after you have satisfied yourself that there's nothing worth stealing down there will you please push in the upper damper rod of the furnace? I forgot to do it." Then he crawled back into bed again.

Identification Necessary.

"Is your mistress at home," inquired Mrs. Borem, standing in the shadow of the doorway.

"I don't know, ma'am," replied the servant. "Can't tell whether she's home or not till I git a good look at ye. If ye hov a wart on the side o' yer nose, ma'am, she ain't."—Philadelphia Ledger.

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