

IN SPITE OF HIS BIRTH.

They were obliged to procure another, as the yacht's boat was not large enough to accommodate them all, and Ned's heart bounded with new hope, as seeing an oar, he helped to propel the light craft toward the vessel, where his friend Hunting was waiting him, and where he believed the stolen treasure would soon be rescued and restored to his employers.

They reached the yacht a little before midnight, and without encountering any other boat on their way; and as they stepped upon the iron staircase leading to the deck, Mr. Hunting leaned over the railing above, and called out in a low, anxious tone:

"Heatherton, is everything all right?"

"All right," Ned answered, cheerily, and in less than two minutes the five newcomers were all standing upon the deck.

The chief soon made his arrangements for the night. He stationed his three men in various portions of the yacht below, to make sure that no mischief should be done in the quarters; then he, with Ned and Mr. Hunting, remained upon the deck to await the return of the first mate and his companions.

It was between three and four in the morning when they came.

Everything was quiet on board the yacht, and they had not a suspicion of the fate awaiting them.

"Ship ahoy!" the mate called out, as the boat shot alongside the iron stairway.

"Ay, ay, sir," was the subdued response that answered this greeting from above, whereupon the men ran lightly up the steps, to be immediately confronted by the powerful policeman, Ned, and Mr. Hunting.

"Not a word, my men," said the chief, as he leveled a revolver at them; "you are my prisoners. Behave yourselves and no harm shall befall you; make any disturbance and iron irons you will go quicker than you will relish."

"What is the meaning of this invasion?" the mate demanded, in a voice that was far from steady.

"It means that you, with all the rest of the crew, are under arrest."

"What for?"

"That is a question that will have to be answered later."

"Where is the captain?"

"In his state-room, subject to the same restrictions as yourself."

The mate made no further resistance, but submitted, with his companions, to be led below and locked up, while Ned, Mr. Hunting and the officer continued their watch on deck for the remainder of the night.

When morning dawned the steward was released upon solemnly promising that he would attend to his regular duties, and make no effort to release any of the crew.

The men must all be fed, and there seemed to be no better way to supply their needs.

He was only too glad to comply with whatever conditions the chief chose to impose upon him, but his movements were closely watched by one of the officers below.

Nichols was also detailed to do service on deck, under the eyes of the three watchmen stationed there.

After a good breakfast, Ned was upon the point of starting again for the city, in the company of one of the officers, to telegraph to the bank his suspicions that the stolen treasure was concealed aboard the Bald Eagle when they espied in the distance a boat containing two persons making toward the yacht.

They concluded to wait a while, hoping that the orders which the captain was expecting from the owner were about to be delivered.

They were not disappointed.

The boat headed directly for the yacht; and when it was within hailing distance, one of the men sang out:

"Is Captain Bielberg of the Bald Eagle on board?"

"Tell him yes," the chief commanded.

"Ay, ay, sir," obediently responded the man.

"I have a telegram for him," came back from the messenger in the boat, "and he must get it for his own man."

"Go for it and bring the book to me," said the officer.

Nichols obeyed.

The officer signed for Captain Bielberg and sent the book back; then deliberately tore open the message and read it.

A grim smile passed over his face as he did so, and he looked up and beckoned to him.

"Read it," he said, as he put the message into Ned's hands, and the young man's eyes devoured it greedily.

It ran thus:

"I shall arrive Friday evening about eight. Meet me at the office, and be ready to sail immediately.—Gould."

"We're sure of our bird now," said the chief, with a chuckle.

Ned grew pale, in spite of the thrill of exultation in his heart.

"What will you do?—go to the city to arrest him?" he inquired, as he passed the telegram to Mr. Hunting.

"No; we will send a boat to meet him, as he orders; then, when he arrives, we will place him under arrest, and have our ropes all together," the officer returned.

"Who will you send with the boat?" Mr. Hunting asked.

"Nichols, attended by one of my subordinates."

"Will he not suspect that something is wrong when he sees that the yacht is not ready to sail?" said Ned.

"I don't care what he suspects, after we once get eye on our man," the officer replied; then he added: "And now you can send word to your firm as soon as you choose. Tell them to despatch some one armed with proper authority immediately, and we'll have this business settled up at short notice."

So Ned went ashore and sent his telegram notifying the officers of the bank of his whereabouts, and entreating them to send some one to him without delay, and one capable of identifying the property belonging to the bank, in case it should be found, as he hoped, on board the Bald Eagle.

He longed to send word to his mother also, but concluded that it would be better to wait a day or two, until he should ascertain just how long he was liable to be detained in Halifax.

His heart also went out, with long

ing, toward Gertrude. He knew her address, and was half tempted to go to her that very day and explain to her all the mysterious circumstances of the last two weeks.

Then he told himself that it would be wiser to wait until everything was settled and he could go to her cleared from all suspicion.

While he was sure that she would have faith in him and believe whatever he should tell her, yet he would not be able to prove anything until the treasure was found and restored to those to whom it belonged.

Then he could face her, proud in his own integrity, and feeling that no one could cast a slur upon his name.

CHAPTER XLIII.

But could Ned have known the treachery of which his dear one was about to become the victim, his joy over the recent conquest which he had achieved would have been greatly marred. Could he have known that even then a message, purporting to come from his father, was being prepared to lure Gertrude into a miserable trap, he would have been wretched indeed.

Bill Hunting had been greatly chagrined by the scornful reception and rejection which the beautiful girl had accorded his proposals of marriage to her. Yowing that he would yet humiliate her haughty spirit, and at the same time revenge himself upon Ned, he began from that moment to plan for the accomplishment of his purpose.

As we have seen, he was associated with Gould, in his various crimes and schemes, and it was only with his assistance that the man had been able to carry out to a successful issue the bold robbery of the Bank. Consequently he had been obliged to agree to certain conditions which Bill named, and among others, that he should be allowed to flee the country in the yacht with him, and that Gould should also assist him to decoy Gertrude aboard the vessel, and compel her to give the location of the treasure. This could be very easily accomplished, he said, since the girl was already in Halifax. The wretch hoped, by thus compromising her, to finally force her to marry him.

Gould protested that such a proceeding would be very unwise, if not dangerous; they would have enough to do, he said, to look out for their own safety, without burdening themselves with a woman. While, too, with Ned also on board, the lovers would be liable to discover the presence of each other, and make them no end of trouble.

But Bill was obstinate. He said they could drop Ned at the first port they sighted, and he need never suspect that the girl was on board.

Gould knew that he was in the fellow's power, and he did not dare refuse to co-operate with him. Therefore, he agreed to yield his objections, though he secretly vowed that he would get rid of Bill at the first foreign port they ran to, and thus save the girl from the wretched fate he had planned for her.

We know that a little more than a week after the robbery and disappearance of Ned, Gertrude left for Halifax with her friend, Mrs. Page, and the following Wednesday Mr. and Mrs. Langmaid sailed for Europe.

Gertrude, as may be supposed, went back feeling very sad and unhappy, for aside from her anxiety about her mother's health, she had many misgivings regarding the fate of her lover, and she began to grow pale and hollow-eyed, greatly to Mrs. Page's uneasiness.

The good lady exerted herself to cheer her and planned many ways to keep her mind occupied, and to prevent her from brooding over her troubles.

During the day while they were together, she succeeded to a certain extent, but when night came and Gertrude retired to the solitude of her own room, the old anxieties would return, and she spent long hours in tears and sighs.

Ned and his friend, Mr. Hunting, achieved their wonderful triumph over the crew of the Bald Eagle on Thursday night, and on Friday Mrs. Page had planned a little excursion into the country for the benefit of her young charge.

She owned a farm a few miles out of the city, and she thought it might be a pleasant change for Gertrude to spend a day or two there, while she herself had business with the farmer, which would require her own presence there.

But the poor girl had spent such a wretched night, that she was not able to rise from her bed when Friday morning dawned, so the trip for her was utterly out of the question.

"This was a great disappointment to Mrs. Page, who, having promised her friend that she would go that day to give some directions to the carpenters regarding needed repairs, felt that it was absolutely necessary for her to keep her appointment."

Gertrude told her not to mind leaving her, that she only needed rest, and would lie quietly in bed and try to sleep the time away, while she was gone.

Her friend promised that she would return that day, although she could not reach home until evening, and after giving orders to the servants to attend faithfully to the young girl's comfort, she bade her an affectionate good-by and departed.

Gertrude slept most of the forenoon, for she was literally exhausted with so much grieving, and finally, when she awoke, feeling greatly refreshed, she arose and dressed herself.

After partaking of a tempting breakfast she sat down to the piano, thinking to while away an hour or two in learning a difficult nocturn which her teacher had recently given her.

While thus engaged the door bell rang a violent peal, and presently a servant entered the drawing-room and handed to her a note, bearing the local postmark.

It was addressed to her in bold, but unfamiliar characters, and she opened it with no little curiosity.

"My dear Gertrude," the note began.

"Why, who in Halifax knows me well enough to address me thus?" Gertrude exclaimed, then referring to the end of the note, she read with great astonishment and no little excitement, the name of "Edward Heatherton."

The name, however, was not like the other writing. It resembled Ned's

chirography, but looked as if it had been traced with difficulty and with a trembling hand.

Turning back to the beginning of the note, she read with a pale and startled face, the following:

"My dear Gertrude—You will doubtless wonder at receiving a note from me, written in a strange hand; but I am ill and not able to write myself. I am also in deep trouble, and of course, you already know, and am at present confined to my state-room on board a vessel, in which I shall sail to-morrow, Saturday, for foreign country, and thus forever sever every tie which binds me to my native land. There is much that I would like to say to you regarding what has recently occurred, and I feel that I cannot go without seeing you once more, for it is probable that we shall never meet again. Will you come to me, Gertrude, for a final farewell? It is a bold request, but I dare not go to you; and, for the sake of the past, I entreat you not to fail me in this hour of despair. I must also ask you to observe the utmost secrecy, if you accede to my request, for my personal safety depends upon it. A carriage will be waiting for you at the corner, near your residence, at eight o'clock this evening, and a guide will be with it to attend you, if your heart has not become so hardened against me that you have no desire to see me again.

"Oh! I pray you do not deny me this boon, before I leave you to become an alien body for all time. As you approach the carriage speak the word 'Eagle' and the guide will bring you to the one I wish to bring to me. Ever, but hopelessly yours, Edward Heatherton."

Gertrude was in tears before she had half finished this torturing letter, and a feeling of utter despair settled upon her heart.

The tone of the whole epistle went to prove that Ned was guilty of the dreadful crime attributed to him. It had, in fact, been cunningly worded with this intention. It seemed to the stricken girl that she could not bear the fresh sorrow, for, in spite of all her loyalty to her lover, and her repeated assertions of devotion to him, she would never lose faith in him, she was now compelled to believe that he had fallen, and that he was, indeed, lost to her forever. She could not, therefore, resist when Ned left the country, they would surely be "parted for all time."

"Oh, I cannot have it so," she wailed, a tempest of unutterable desolation and despair, sweeping over her soul. "He seemed so lately noble and true, I never would have believed, but for this, that he could be guilty of such a crime. How can I give him up? What shall I do? How can I let him go away into exile and never see him again? My whole life is ruined, and I have lost my only whole heart. I love him now, in spite of all, and to him—or at least to what I believed him—I must be true until I die."

She walked the floor in restless wretchedness, tears raining over her face, great, heart-broken sobs bursting from her quivering lips, while she tried to decide whether she would go to him or not.

"He is ill, poor fellow," she murmured, referring again to the letter. "In a moment of temptation he has fallen, and now he is reaping the fruits of his bitter act. Oh! Ned, Ned! it does not seem as if I could believe it even now, with this letter of evidence before me. Who can have written this note for him?" she went on, and she studied the strange writing, yet never questioning the truth of the epistle, since it had that familiar signature at the end. "Can it be some accomplice, and are they going to escape to another country with me? I am so afraid! Shall I go to him? May I not, at least, go and appeal to him to restore what he has taken, and let him, for my sake, never yield to temptation again?"

Her heart said "yes"; her judgment told her "no"; that it would be a very unwise thing to do; that it would be far better, if they must part forever, to avoid a harrowing and probably a useless interview.

"And yet, he was ill; he begged for this last appeal;—a 'final farewell.'"

Could she be hard enough to refuse it—could she allow him to feel that she condemned him and was utterly indifferent to his fate, when he must be suffering keenly since he had not been able to write himself, and could hardly trace his signature in a legible manner?

"Oh, if Mrs. Page was only here!" the deeply tried girl sighed, "I would confide in her and ask her advice; but she will not be back until long after eight, and thus I am left to act upon my own responsibility. Papa forbade me to have anything more to say to him," she continued, musingly. "I suppose he would tell me, if he were here, that it would be my duty to give him up to the authorities, but that I could not do. Was ever any one placed in such a trying position before?"

She threw herself upon a lounge, exhausted from the conflict within her, and trembling with nervous excitement, and utterly unable to think her way out of the perplexing situation.

She shrank from going out alone, even to meet for the last time the man she so dearly loved, and from trusting herself to strange guides. All the finer instincts of her womanly nature revolted against the arrangement.

And yet she knew if she refused this last appeal—if she allowed Ned to go forever out of her life without a word of kindly farewell, without earnestly entreating him to restore the money, which she was forced to believe he had taken, and strive to live honorably in the future, she would always regret it, and never cease to reproach herself for having neglected the opportunity.

For his heart-broken mother's sake also she felt as if she owed him this much, and finally, after hours of mental struggle, she decided to brave everything and grant him the boon he had craved.

Still, as the hour grew near, she recoiled more and more from the trying ordeal, wishing most fervently that Mrs. Page was at home to go with her, as a protector, for she believed that she would attend her in this hour of great trial, and that she might not approve of what she contemplated.

Once she resolved that she would take one of the servants with her, she reasoned that it would be a great risk, it might result in Ned's arrest, and conviction, followed by long years of imprisonment, and she would

always feel that she had doomed him to the same sad fate.

No, if she went at all, she must go alone; and, finally putting aside all personal feelings, she decided that she would hazard everything for the sake of comforting Ned, and finally persuading him to do what was right.

At half-past seven she went to her room, telling Mary, the second girl, that she did not wish to be disturbed again this night; if Mrs. Page returned to say that she was better, and hoped to be quite herself in the morning.

Then, locking herself in, she donned a dark dress and hat, and tied a thick, brown veil over her face, after which she stole softly out of the house without attracting the attention of any one.

She had a latch-key which Mrs. Page had given to her when she first came to Halifax, therefore she knew that she would find no difficulty in getting in again, and hoped she would never be the wiser for her night's adventure.

It lacked just five minutes of eight as she ran lightly down the steps into the street.

The night was cloudy, consequently it was darker than usual at that hour, so that Gertrude did not fear being identified by any one.

She sped along to the corner where she found a carriage stationed as she had expected.

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