Henty George Alfred

Through Russian Snows: A Story of Napoleon's Retreat from Moscow

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Содержание

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PREFACE

There are few campaigns that, either in point of the immense scale upon which it was undertaken, the completeness of its failure, or the enormous loss of life entailed, appeal to the imagination in so great a degree as that of Napoleon against Russia. Fortunately, we have in the narratives of Sir Robert Wilson, British commissioner with the Russian army, and of Count Segur, who was upon Napoleon's staff, minute descriptions of the events as seen by eye-witnesses, and besides these the campaign has been treated fully by various military writers. I have as usual avoided going into details of horrors and of acts of cruelty and ferocity on both sides, surpassing anything in modern warfare, and have given a mere outline of the operations, with a full account of the stern fight at Smolensk and the terrible struggle at Borodino. I would warn those of my readers who may turn to any of the military works for a further history of the campaign, that the spelling of Russian places and names varies so greatly in the accounts of different writers, that sometimes it is difficult to believe that the same person or town is meant, and even in the narratives by Sir Robert Wilson, and by Lord Cathcart, our ambassador at St. Petersburg, who was in constant communication with him, scarcely a name will be found similarly spelt. I mention this, as otherwise much confusion might be caused by those who may compare my story with some of these recognized authorities, or follow the incidents of the campaign upon maps of Russia.

Yours sincerely,
G.A. HENTY.

CHAPTER I
TWO BROTHERS

When Colonel Wyatt died, all Weymouth agreed that it was a most unfortunate thing for his sons Julian and Frank. The loss of a father is always a misfortune to lads, but it was more than usually so in this case. They had lost their mother years before, and Colonel Wyatt's sister had since kept house for him. As a housekeeper she was an efficient substitute, as a mother to the boys she was a complete failure. How she ever came to be Colonel Wyatt's sister was a puzzle to all their acquaintances. The Colonel was quick and alert, sharp and decisive in speech, strong in his opinions, peremptory in his manner, kindly at heart, but irascible in temper. Mrs. Troutbeck was gentle and almost timid in manner; report said that she had had a hard time of it in her married life, and that Troutbeck had frightened out of her any vestige of spirit that she had ever possessed. Mrs. Troutbeck never argued, and was always in perfect agreement with any opinion expressed, a habit that was constantly exciting the wrath and indignation of her brother.

The idea of controlling the boys never once entered her mind. So long as the Colonel was alive there was no occasion for such control, and in this respect she did not attempt after his death to fill his place. It seemed, indeed, that she simply transferred her allegiance from the Colonel to them. Whatever they did was right in her eyes, and they were allowed to do practically whatever they pleased. There was a difference in age of three years and a half between the brothers; Julian at the time of his father's death being sixteen, while Frank was still a few months short of thirteen. Casual acquaintances often remarked that there was a great likeness between them; and, indeed, both were pleasant-looking lads with somewhat fair complexions, their brown hair having a tendency to stand up in a tuft on the forehead, while both had grey eyes, and square foreheads. Mrs. Troutbeck was always ready to assent to the remark as to their likeness, but would gently qualify it by saying that it did not strike her so much as it did other people.

"Their dispositions are quite different," she said, "and knowing them as I do, I see the same differences in their faces."

Any close observer would, indeed, have recognized it at once. Both faces were pleasant, but while Julian's wore an expression of easy good temper, and a willingness to please and to be pleased, there was a lack of power and will in the lower part of the face; there was neither firmness in the mouth nor determination in the chin. Upon the other hand, except when smiling or talking, Frank's lips were closely pressed together, and his square chin and jaw clearly indicated firmness of will and tenacity of purpose. Julian was his aunt's favourite, and was one of the most popular boys at his school. He liked being popular, and as long as it did not put him to any great personal trouble was always ready to fall in with any proposal, to take part in every prank, to lend or give money if he had it in his pocket, to sympathize with any one in trouble.

"He has the most generous disposition of any boy I ever saw!" his aunt would frequently declare. "He's always ready to oblige. No matter what he is doing, he will throw it aside in a moment if I want anything done, or ask him to go on an errand into the town. Frank is very nice, he is very kind and all that sort of thing, but he goes his own way more, and I don't find him quite so willing to oblige as Julian; but then, of course, he is much younger, and one can't expect a boy of twelve to be as thoughtful to an old woman as a young fellow of nearly seventeen."

As time went on the difference in their characters became still more marked. Julian had left school a year after his father's death, and had since been doing nothing in particular. He had talked vaguely of going into the army, and his father's long services would have given him a claim for a commission had he decided upon writing to ask for one, but Julian could never bring himself to decide upon anything. Had there been an old friend of his father's at hand ready to settle the matter

for him he would have made no opposition whatever, but his aunt was altogether opposed to the idea, and so far from urging him to move in the matter she was always ready to say, whenever it happened to be mentioned, "There is no hurry, my dear Julian. We hear terrible stories of the hardships that the soldiers suffer in Spain; and although, if you decide upon going, of course I can't say no, still there can be no hurry about it."

This was quite Julian's own opinion. He was very comfortable where he was. He was his own master, and could do as he liked. He was amply supplied with pocket-money by his aunt; he was fond of sailing, fishing, and shooting; and as he was a general favourite among the boatmen and fishermen he was able to indulge in his fondness for the sea to as large an extent as he pleased, though it was but seldom that he had a chance of a day's shooting. Julian had other tastes of a less healthy character; he was fond of billiards and of society, he had a fine voice and a taste for music, and the society he chose was not that most calculated to do him good. He spent less and less of his time at home, and rarely returned of an evening until the other members of the household were in bed. Whatever his aunt thought of the matter she never remonstrated with him, and was always ready to make the excuse to herself, "I can't expect a fine young fellow like that to be tied to an old woman's apron-strings. Young men will be young men, and it is only natural that he should find it dull at home."

When Julian arrived at the age of nineteen it was tacitly understood that the idea of his going into the army had been altogether dropped, and that when a commission was asked for, it would be for Frank. Although Julian was still her favourite, Mrs. Troutbeck was more favourably disposed towards Frank than of old. She knew from her friends that he was quite as popular among his schoolmates as his brother had been, although in a different way. He was a hard and steady worker, but he played as hard as he worked, and was a leader in every game. He, however, could say "no" with a decision that was at once recognized as being final, and was never to be persuaded into joining in any forbidden amusement or to take share in any mischievous adventure. When his own work was done he was always willing to give a quarter of an hour to assist any younger lad who found his lessons too hard for him, and though he was the last boy to whom any one would think of applying for a loan of money, he would give to the extent of his power in any case where a subscription was raised for a really meritorious purpose.

Thus when the school contributed a handsome sum towards a fund that was being raised for the relief of the families of the fishermen who had been lost, when four of their boats were wrecked in a storm, no one except the boys who got up the collection knew that nearly half the amount for which the school gained credit came from the pocket of Frank Wyatt.

The brothers, though differing so widely in disposition, were very fond of each other. In his younger years Frank had looked up to his big brother as a sort of hero, and Julian's good-nature and easy-going temper led him to be always kind to his young brother, and to give him what he valued most – assistance at his lessons and a patient attention to all his difficulties. As the years went on, Frank came to perceive clearly enough the weak points in his brother's character, and with his usual outspokenness sometimes remonstrated with him strongly.

"It is horrible to see a fellow like you wasting your life as you do, Julian. If you don't care for the army, why don't you do something else? I should not care what it was, so that it but gave you something to occupy yourself, and if it took you out of here, all the better. You know that you are not doing yourself any good."

"I am not doing myself any harm, you young beggar," Julian replied good temperedly.

"I don't know, Julian," the boy said sturdily; "you are not looking half as well as you used to do. I am sure late hours don't suit you, and there is no good to be got out of billiards. I know the sort of fellows you meet there are not the kind to do you any good, or that father would have liked to see you associate with if he had been alive. Just ask yourself honestly if you think he would. If you can say 'yes,' I will shut up and say no more about it; but can you say 'yes'?"

Julian was silent. "I don't know that I can," he said after a pause. "There is no harm in any of them that I know of, but I suppose that in the way you put it, they are not the set father would have fancied, with his strict notions. I have thought of giving it up a good many times, but it is an awkward thing, when you are mixed up with a lot of fellows, to drop them without any reason."

"You have only got to say that you find late hours don't agree with you, and that you have made up your mind to cut it altogether."

"That is all very well for you, Frank, and I will do you justice to say that if you determined to do a thing, you would do it without minding what any one said."

"Without minding what any one I did not care for, said," Frank interrupted. "Certainly; why should I heed a bit what people I do not care for say, so long as I feel that I am doing what is right."

"I wish I were as strong-willed as you are, Frank," Julian said rather ruefully, "then I should not have to put up with being bullied by a young brother."

"You are too good tempered, Julian," Frank said, almost angrily. "Here are you, six feet high and as strong as a horse, and with plenty of brain for anything, just wasting your life. Look at the position father held here, and ask yourself how many of his old friends do you know. Why, rather than go on as you are doing, I would enlist and go out to the Peninsula and fight the French. That would put an end to all this sort of thing, and you could come back again and start afresh. You will have money enough for anything you like. You come into half father's £16,000 when you come of age, and I have no doubt that you will have Aunt's money."

"Why should I?" Julian asked in a more aggrieved tone than he had hitherto used.

"Because you are her favourite, Julian, and quite right that you should be. You have always been awfully good to her, and that is one reason why I hate you to be out of an evening; for although she never says a word against you, and certainly would not hear any one else do so, I tell you it gives me the blues to see her face as she sits there listening for your footsteps."

"It is a beastly shame, and I will give it up, Frank; honour bright, I will."

"That is right, old fellow; I knew you would if you could only once peep in through the window of an evening and see her face."

"As for her money," Julian went on, "if she does not divide it equally between us, I shall, you may be sure."

"I sha'n't want it," Frank said decidedly. "You know I mean to go into the army, and with the interest of my own money I shall have as much as I shall possibly want, and if I had more it would only bother me, and do me harm in my profession. With you it is just the other way. You are the head of the family, and as Father's son ought to take a good place. You could buy an estate and settle down on it, and what with its management, and with horses and hunting and shooting, you would be just in your element."

"Well, we will see about it when the time comes. I am sure I hope the old lady will be with us for a long time yet. She is as kind-hearted a soul as ever lived, though it would have been better for me, no doubt, if she held the reins a little tighter. Well, anyhow, Frank, I will cut the billiards altogether."

They exchanged a silent grip of the hand on the promise, and Julian, looking more serious than usual, put on his hat and went out. There was a curious reversal of the usual relations between the brothers. Julian, although he always laughed at his young brother's assumption of the part of mentor, really leant upon his stronger will, and as often as not, even if unconsciously, yielded to his influence, while Frank's admiration for his brother was heightened by the unfailing good temper with which the latter received his remonstrances and advice. "He is an awfully good fellow," he said to himself when Julian left the room. "Anyone else would have got into a rage at my interference; but he has only one fault; he can't say no, and that is at the root of everything. I can't understand myself why a fellow finds it more difficult to say no than to say yes. If it is right to do a thing one does it, if it is not right one leaves it alone, and the worst one has to stand, if you don't do what other fellows want, is a certain amount of chaff, and that hurts no one."

Frank, indeed, was just as good tempered as Julian, although in an entirely different way. He had never been known to be in a passion, but put remonstrance and chaff aside quietly, and went his own way without being in the slightest degree affected by them.

Julian kept his promise, and was seen no more in the billiard saloon. Fortunately for him the young fellows with whom he was in the habit of playing were all townsmen, clerks, the sons of the richer tradesmen, or of men who owned fishing-boats or trading vessels, and others of that class – not, indeed, as Frank had said, the sort of men whom Colonel Wyatt would have cared for his son to have associated with – but harmless young fellows who frequented the billiard-rooms as a source of amusement and not of profit, and who therefore had no motive for urging Julian to play. To Mrs. Troutbeck's delight he now spent four or five evenings at home, only going out for an hour to smoke a pipe and to have a chat with the fishermen. Once or twice a week he would be absent all night, going out, as he told his aunt, for a night's fishing, and generally returning in the morning with half a dozen mackerel or other fish as his share of the night's work.

Sometimes he would ask Frank to accompany him, and the latter, when he had no particular work on hand, would do so, and thoroughly enjoyed the sport.

Smuggling was at the time carried on extensively, and nowhere more actively than between Weymouth and Exmouth on the one hand, and Swanage on the other. Consequently, in spite of the vigilance of the revenue men, cargoes were frequently run. The long projection of Chesil Beach and Portland afforded a great advantage to the smugglers; and Lieutenant Downes, who commanded the revenue cutter *Boxer*, had been heard to declare that he would gladly subscribe a year's pay if a channel could be cut through the beach. Even when he obtained information that a cargo was likely to be run to the west, unless the winds and tides were alike propitious, it took so long a time to get round Portland Bill that he was certain to arrive too late to interfere with the landing, while, at times, an adverse wind and the terrors of the "race" with its tremendous current and angry waves would keep the *Boxer* lying for days to the west of the Island, returning to Weymouth only to hear that during her absence a lugger had landed her cargo somewhere to the east.

"Job himself would have lost his temper if he had been a revenue officer at Weymouth," Lieutenant Downes would exclaim angrily. "Why, sir, I would rather lie for three months off the mouth of an African river looking for slavers, than be stationed at Weymouth in search of smuggling craft, for a month; it is enough to wear a man to a thread-paper. Half the coast population seem to me to be in alliance with these rascals, and I am so accustomed to false information now, that as a rule when one of my men gets a hint that a cargo is going to be run near Swanage I start at once for the west, knowing well enough that wherever the affair is to come off it certainly will not be within ten miles of the point named. Even in Weymouth itself the sympathy of the population lies rather with the smugglers than the revenue men."

The long war with France had rendered brandy, French wines, lace, and silks fabulously dear, and the heavy duties charged reduced to a minimum the legitimate traffic that might otherwise have been carried on; therefore, even well-to-do people favoured the men who brought these luxuries to their doors, at a mere fraction of the price that they would otherwise have had to pay for them. Then, too, there was an element of romance in the career of a smuggler who risked his life every day, and whose adventures, escapes, and fights with the revenue men were told round every fireside. The revenue officer was not far wrong when he said that the greater portion of the population round the coast, including all classes, were friendly to, if not in actual alliance with, the smugglers. Julian was well aware that many of the fishermen with whom he went out often lent a hand to the smugglers in landing their goods and taking them inland, or in hiding them in caves in the cliffs known only to the smugglers and themselves. He had heard many stories from them of adventures in which they had been engaged, and the manner in which, by showing signal lights from the sea, they had induced the revenue men to hurry to the spot at which they had seen a flash, and so to leave the coast clear for the landing of the goods.

"It must be great fun," he said one day. "I must say I should like to take part in running a cargo, for once."

"Well, Master Julian, there would not be much difficulty about that, if so be you really mean it. We can put you up to it easy enough, but you know, sir, it isn't all fun. Sometimes the revenue men come down upon us in spite of all the pains we take to throw them off the scent. Captain Downes is getting that artful that one is never sure whether he has been got safely away or not. A fortnight ago he pretty nigh came down on a lugger that was landing a cargo in Lulworth Cove. We thought that it had all been managed well. Word had gone round that the cargo was to be run there, and the morning before, a woman went on to the cliffs and got in talk with one of the revenue men. She let out, as how her husband had been beating her, and she had made up her mind to pay him out. There was going, she said, to be a cargo run that night at a point half way between Weymouth and Lyme Regis.

"I know she did the part well, as she acted it on three or four of us afterwards, and the way she pretended to be in a passion and as spiteful as a cat, would have taken any fellow in. In course the revenue chap asked her what her name was and where she lived, and I expect they did not find her when they looked for her afterwards in the place she told him. He wanted her to go with him to the officer of the station, but she said that she would never do that, for if it got to be known that she had peached about it, it would be as much as her life was worth. Well, a boy who was watching saw the revenue chap go off, as soon as she was out of sight, straight to the coast-guard station, and ten minutes later the officer in charge there set off for Weymouth.

"The boy followed and he saw him go on board the *Boxer*. Directly afterwards Captain Downes came ashore with him and had a long talk with the chief of the coast-guard there; then he went on board again, and we all chuckled when we saw the *Boxer* get up her anchor, set all sail, make out to Portland, and go round the end of the rock. Two hours later a look-out on the hills saw her bearing out to sea to the southwest, meaning, in course, to run into the bay after it was dark. On shore the officer at Weymouth got a horse and rode along the cliffs to the eastward. He stopped at each coast-guard station, right on past Lulworth, and soon afterwards three parts of the men at each of them turned out and marched away west.

"We thought that we had fooled them nicely, and that evening half a dozen of our boats sailed into Lulworth harbour and anchored there quiet. One of them rowed ashore and landed two hands to look round. They brought back news as there were only two or three revenue men left at the station, and it would be easy enough to seize them and tie them up till it was all over. In course, everything worked for a bit just as we thought it would. The lugger we were expecting showed her light in the offing and was signalled that the coast was clear. It was a dark night, and the two revenue men on duty in the cove were seized and tied up by some of the shore band without a blow being struck. Two or three chaps were placed at the door of the station, so that if the two men left there turned out they would be gagged at once. Everything was ready, and a big lot of carts came down to the water's edge. The lugger anchored outside the cove; we got up our kedges and rowed out to her, and a dozen shoreboats did the same. As soon as we got alongside they began to bundle the kegs in, when not three hundred yards away came a hail, 'What craft is that?'

"It struck us all into a heap, and you could have heard a pin drop. Then came the hail again, 'If you don't answer I will sink you,' whereupon the skipper of the lugger shouted out, 'the *Jennie* of Portsmouth.' 'Lend a hand, lads, with the sails,' he whispered to us; 'slip the cable, Tom.' We ran up the sails in a jiffy, you may be sure, and all the sharper that, as they were half-way up, four guns flashed out. One hulled the lugger, the others flew overhead. Close as they were they could not have seen us, for we could scarce see them and we were under the shadow of the cliffs, but I suppose they fired at the voices. 'Sink the tubs, lads,' the skipper said as the lugger glided away from us. There was a nice little air blowing off shore, and she shot away into the darkness in no time. We all rowed into the mouth of the cove for shelter, and were only just in time, for a shower of grape splashed the water up a few yards behind us.

"We talked it over for a minute or two, and settled that the *Boxer* would be off after the lugger and would not pay any more attention to us. Some of them were in favour of taking the kegs that we had got ashore, but the most of us were agin that, and the captain himself had told us to sink them, so we rowed out of the cove again and tied sinkers to the kegs and lowered them down three or four hundred yards west of the mouth of the cove. We went on board our boats and the other chaps went on shore, and you may guess we were not long in getting up our sails and creeping out of the cove. It was half an hour after the first shots were fired before we heard the *Boxer* at it again. I reckon that in the darkness they could not make out whether the lugger had kept along east or west under the cliffs, and I expect they went the wrong way at first, and only found her at last with their night-glasses when she was running out to sea.

"Well, next morning we heard that the shore men had not landed five minutes when there was a rush of forty or fifty revenue men into the village. There ain't no doubt they had only gone west to throw us off our guard, and, as soon as it was dark, turned and went eastward. They could not have known that the job was to come off at Lulworth, but were on the look-out all along, and I reckon that it was the same with the *Boxer*. She must have beaten back as soon as it was dark enough for her not to be seen from the hills, and had been crawling along on the look-out close to the shore, when she may have caught sight of the lugger's signal. Indeed, we heard afterwards that it called back the coast-guard men, for they had passed Lulworth and were watching at a spot between that and St. Alban's Head, where a cargo had been run a month or two before, when they caught sight of the signal off Lulworth. Well, you may guess they did not get much for their pains. The carts had all made off as soon as they heard the *Boxer's* guns, and knew that the game was up, for the night anyhow, and they found every light out in Lulworth, and everyone, as it seemed, fast asleep. I believe, from what I have heard, that there was a great row afterwards between Captain Downes and the revenue officer ashore. The chap ashore would have it that it was all the captain's fault for being in such a hurry, and that if he had waited an hour they would have got all the carts with the cargo, even if he had not caught the lugger.

"Well, that was true enough; but I don't see that Downes was to blame, for until he came along he could not be sure where the lugger was, and indeed she was so close in under the cliff that it is like enough he would have missed her altogether and have gone on another two or three miles, if it had not been that they caught the noise of the boats alongside her taking in the kegs. The lugger got away all right; she is a fast craft, and though the *Boxer* can walk along in a strong wind, in a light breeze the lugger had the legs of her altogether. That shows you, Mr. Julian, that Captain Downes has cut his eye-teeth, and that it is mighty hard to fool him. He was never nearer making a good capture than he was that night. The lugger ran her cargo two nights afterwards at the very spot where the woman had told the revenue man that she was going to do it. There was a little bit of a fight, but the coast-guard were not strong enough to do any good, and had to make off, and before they could bring up anything like a strong force, every bale and keg had been carried inland, and before morning there was scarce a farmhouse within ten miles that had not got some of it stowed away in their snug hiding-places. Downes will be more vicious than ever after that job, and you see, master, you are like to run a goodish risk of getting your head broke and of being hauled off to jail. Still, if you would like to join some night in a run we can put you in the way."

"Yes, I should like it very much," Julian said. "There can't be much risk, for there has not been anything like a regular fight anywhere along this part of the coast for the last two years, and from what I have heard, there must have been twenty cargoes run in that time."

"All that, sir, all that; nigher thirty, I should say. There is three luggers at it reg'lar."

"Are they French or English?"

"Two of them is French and one English, but the crews are all mixed. They carry strong crews all of them, and a longish gun in their sterns, so that in case they are chased they may have a chance of knocking away a spar out of anything after them. They would not fight if a cutter came up alongside

them – that might make a hanging matter of it, while if none of the revenue chaps are killed it is only a case of long imprisonment, though the English part of the crew generally have the offer of entering on a king's ship instead, and most of them take it. Life on board a man-of-war may not be a pleasant one, but after all it is better than being boxed up in a prison for years. Anyhow, that is the light in which I should look at it myself."

"I should think so," Julian agreed. "However, you see there is no great risk in landing the kegs, for it is very seldom you get so nearly caught as you did at Lulworth. Let me know when the next affair is coming off, Bill, and if it is anywhere within a moderate distance of Weymouth I will go with you if you will take me. Anyhow, whether I go or not, you may be quite sure that I shall keep the matter to myself."

"The most active chap about here," Bill said after he had hauled his nets, and the boat was making her way back to Weymouth, "is that Faulkner. He is a bitter bad one, he is. Most of the magistrates about here don't trouble their heads about smuggling, and if they find a keg of first class brandy quite accidental any morning on their doorstep, they don't ask where it comes from, but just put it down into their cellars. Sometimes information gets sworn before them, and they has to let the revenue people know, but somehow or other, I can't say how it is," and the fisherman gave a portentous wink, "our fellows generally get some sort of an idea that things ain't right, and the landing don't come off as expected; queer, ain't it? But that fellow Faulkner, he ain't like that. He worries hisself about the smugglers just about as much as Captain Downes does. He is just as hard on smugglers as he is on poachers, and he is wonderful down on them, he is. Do you know him, sir?"

"I know him by sight. He is a big, pompous man; his place is about two miles up the valley, and there are some large woods round it."

"That is so, sir; and they say as they are chock-full of pheasants. He has a lot of keepers, and four years ago there was a desperate fight there. Two keepers and three poachers got shot, and two others were caught; they were tried at the 'sizes for murder and hanged. He is a regular bully, he is, but he ain't no coward. If he was he would never stir out after sunset, but instead of that he is out night after night on the cliffs, when there is any talk of a cargo being run. He is known to carry pistols about with him, and so though his life has been threatened many times, nothing has ever come of it. One thing is, he has got a big black horse, about the best horse there is in this part of the country, and he always rides mighty fast down into the town or up on to the cliffs, where he gets among the revenue men, and in course he is safe enough. He was down with that lot at Lulworth that night, and they say he cussed and swore loud enough to be heard all over the village, when they found that they had got there too late. He is a bitter bad weed, is Faulkner."

"I know he is very unpopular even in the town," Julian said. "He is the hardest magistrate on the bench, and if it were not for the others not a man brought before him would ever get off. I have heard that he is very much disliked by the other magistrates, and that some time ago, when he wanted to join the club, they would not have him at any price. I can't make out why a fellow should go out of his way to make himself disliked. I can understand his being down on poachers; no one likes to be robbed, but the smuggling cannot make any difference to him one way or the other."

"No; that is what we says. It don't concern him, 'cept that magistrates are bound in a sort of way to see that the law is not broken. But why shouldn't he do like the others and go on his way quiet, unless he gets an information laid before him, or a warning from the revenue people as he is wanted. You mark my words, Master Julian, some night that chap will get a bullet or a charge of shot in his body."

After this Julian went on more than one occasion with Bill and other fishermen to look on at the landing of contraband cargoes. If the distance was within a walk they would start from Weymouth straight inland, and come down by the road along which the carts were to fetch the goods up, for it was only occasionally that the fishermen would take their boats. At Lulworth, of course, there had been no risk in their doing so, as boats, when fishing to the east, would often make their way into the cove and drop anchor there for a few hours. But when the run was to be made at lonely spots, the

sight of fishing boats making in to anchor would have excited the suspicions of the coast-guard on the cliffs. The number of fishermen who took part in the smugglers' proceedings was but small. All of these had either brothers or other relations on board the luggers, or were connected with some of the smugglers' confederates on shore. They received a handsome sum for their night's work, which was at times very hard, as the kegs had often to be carried up steep and dangerous paths to the top of the cliffs, and then a considerable distance across the downs to the nearest points the carts could come to.

It was the excitement of the adventure, however, rather than the pay, and the satisfaction derived from outwitting the revenue men, that was the main attraction to the fishermen. Julian took no share in the work. He went dressed in the rough clothes he wore on the fishing excursions at night, and heartily enjoyed the animated bustle of the scene, as scores of men carrying kegs or bales on their backs, made their way up some narrow ravine, silently laid down their loads beside the carts and pack-horses, and then started back again for another trip. He occasionally lent a hand to lash the kegs on either side of the horses, or to lift a bale into the cart. No one ever asked any question; it was assumed that he was there with one of the carts, and he recognized the wisdom of Bill's advice the first time he went out.

"It is best not to speak till you are spoken to, Master Julian; there is more chaps there besides yourself, as are thought to be sound asleep in their beds at Weymouth, and it is just as well to keep yourself to yourself. There is never no knowing when things may go wrong, and then it is as likely as not that some one may peach, and the fewer names as comes out the better. Now you mind, sir, if there is an alarm, and the revenue chaps come down on us, you just make a bolt at once. It ain't no business of yours, one way or the other. You ain't there to make money or to get hold of cheap brandy; you just go to look on and amuse yourself, and all you have got to do is to make off as hard as you can go directly there is an alarm. Everyone else does the same as gets a chance, I can tell you. The country people never fight; though the smugglers, if they are cornered, and can't get back to the lugger without it, will use their weapons if they see a chance; but you have got nothing to do with that. Don't you wait a minute for me and my mates, for we shall bolt too. If we were on the shore when they came on us we should embark with the crew and get on board the lugger. In course, if just a few of the revenue men were fools enough to come on us, they would be tumbled over in double quick time, and tied up till the goods were all taken inland, and be left till some of their mates found them in the morning.

"That is how it is, you know, that we get most of our cargoes run. One of the chaps on the cliff may make us out, but you see it takes a long time to send along the line and get enough of them together to interfere with us. Unless they have got a pretty good strong force together, they ain't such fools as to risk their lives by meddling with a hundred men or more, with a lot of valuable goods to land, and the knowledge that if they are caught it is a long term in jail. The men know well enough that if there is anything on, there will be a watch kept over them, and that if they were to fire a pistol as a signal, there would be news of it sent to the smugglers in no time. Sometimes, too, the coast-guards nearest the point where the landing is to be, are pounced on suddenly and tied up. I reckon, too, that a good many of them keep an eye shut as long as they can, and then go off pretty leisurely to pass the word along that they have heard oars or have seen signals, especially if they have got a hot-headed boatswain in charge of their station, a sort of chap who would want to go down to meddle with a hundred men, with only five or six at his back. A man with a wife and some children, perhaps, don't relish the thought of going into a bad scrimmage like that if he can keep out of it; why should he? He gets a bit of money if they make a good seizure, but he knows well enough that he ain't going to make a seizure unless he has got a pretty strong party; and you take my word for it, four times out of five when we make a clear run, it is because the coast-guard keep an eye closed as long as they dare. They know well enough that it ain't such an uncommon thing for a man to be found at the bottom of the cliff, without anything to show how he got there, and the coroner's jury finds as it was a dark night and he tumbled over, and they brings in a verdict according. But it ain't every

man as cares about taking the risk of accidents of that kind, and, somehow or other, they happens to just the chaps as is wonderful sharp and active. They have all been sailors, you know, and are ready enough for a fight when they are strong enough to have a chance, but that is a very different thing from walking backwards and forwards on a dark night close to the edge of a cliff, three or four hundred feet high, without a comrade within a quarter of a mile, and the idea that an accident of this kind might occur any time."

CHAPTER II
BEFORE THE JUSTICES

One morning when Frank was dressing, the servant came up and told him that a fisherman, who said his name was Bill Bostock, wanted to speak to him. As he had often been out with Julian in the man's boat, he put on his jacket and ran to the door.

"Good morning, Bill!" he said; "what is it?"

"I will talk with you outside, sir, if you don't mind."

A good deal surprised Frank put on his cap and went out with him.

"There has been a bad business, Master Frank, a mighty bad job."

"What sort of a job, Bill?"

"A smuggling affair, Master Frank. There was a fight. I hears one of the revenue men was killed. I don't know as that is so, but some of them have been knocked about, and have got some pistol wounds, no doubt. But that ain't the worst part of the business. Mr. Julian is among those as has been caught."

"Julian!" Frank exclaimed in astonishment. "Why, what in the world had Julian got to do with it?"

"Well, sir," the sailor said apologetically, "you see it was like this. Mr. Julian is a young gentleman as loves a bit of a spree, and he has been out many a night with some of us to see a cargo run."

Frank uttered an exclamation of surprise and consternation.

"I thought perhaps as you knowed it, sir."

"I never dreamt of such a thing, Bill. How could Julian have been so mad as to mix himself up in such a business? I suppose this is your doing; you must have led him into this mischief."

"No, sir," the sailor said in an aggrieved voice. "How was I to lead a young gentleman like your brother into a thing as he didn't choose to do? I don't say as I didn't mention to him, promiscuous like, that I lent a hand some times in running a cargo; but how was I to know as he would up and say, 'I will go with you some night, Bill.' Well, I argues with him, and I points out to him as he might get into a scrape; but, says he, 'I am not going to take no share in it, but just want to look on and see the fun,' as he calls it. I points out to him as it was not always fun, but he puts that aside, and, says he, it would not be fun unless there was a little excitement about it. He promised me faithful that he would always cut and run as soon as he heard there was any talk of the revenue men a-coming, and what was I to do? I don't say, sir, as how if it had been you I would have taken you with me, 'cause you are young, you see, and I should have felt as I was 'sponsible for you. But Mr. Julian is a man now, and when he says, 'I mean to go with you anyhow, Bill,' it was not for me to say, you sha'n't go. Mr. Julian, he is a sort of gent that gets over one somehow, and there ain't no saying 'no' to him."

"Well, it is of no use talking about that now," Frank said impatiently. "First tell me all about it, and then we will see what had best be done."

"Well, Master Frank, it was eight miles to the west. The chaps concerned in it thought they had managed to throw dust into the eyes of Captain Downes, and to get the *Boxer* away to Swanage, and how he got wind of the affair, and where it was to be, is more nor I can tell. Everything was going on smooth enough, and half the cargo was in the carts, when all of a sudden there was a shout 'Surrender, you scoundrels!' and that fellow Faulkner dashed up with a pistol in his hand, and behind him came a score of revenue men. I dodged under a cart and bolted. I heard some pistol shots fired, for just at that time a lot of the smugglers had come up to the carts with kegs. As if the firing on shore had been a signal, I heard directly after some guns down by the water, and knew that Downes and the *Boxer* had come on the lugger. I made straight back, but I could not sleep all night for wondering

whether Mr. Julian had got off too, and I was up afore it was light, and went round to one or two of the other chaps as was there. One had not come back; the other had only been in half an hour. He had hid up, close to where we was surprised.

"After it was over the revenue chaps lit a lot of lanterns and then made a big fire, and by its light my mate could see pretty well what was going on. They had got about twenty prisoners. Most of the country people and carts had, luckily enough for them, gone off with their loads a few minutes afore the revenue men came up. A dozen pack-horses and three or four carts had been took, and, in course, all the loads the men were carrying up. Among those who was took was Mr. Julian. He was standing close to me when they came up, and I expect he was collared immediate. Faulkner, he sat down on a tub by the side of the fire and takes out a book, and the prisoners was brought up one by one and questions asked them. Mr. Julian was one of the last. Faulkner got up from his seat and rowed him tremendous. What he said my mate could not catch, but he could hear his voice, and he was going on at him cruel; then I suppose Mr. Julian lost his temper, and my mate says he could see that he was giving it him back hot. I expect it was something wonderful hard and nasty he said, for Faulkner jumped at him and hit him in the face. Then your brother threw himself on him. My mate says he would have thrown him backwards into the fire, if some of the revenue men had not seized him and dragged him off.

"After that there was a row between Faulkner and Captain Downes, who had come up just before with half a dozen sailors. I expect Downes was telling him that he ought to be ashamed of himself. Anyhow they got to high words, as was easy to be heard. Half an hour later most of them started with the prisoners, leaving half a dozen of the officers to look after the things they had taken. When they had gone, my mate went down close to the water, and was able to make out the cutter and the lugger anchored close together – so she has been caught. There was nothing else to wait for, so he tramped off home and had only been in a few minutes before I came to him."

"This is awful," Frank said, in dismay. "The only thing I see that can be done is for me to go and have a talk with Captain Downes. He was a friend of my father's; and I think he is a kind-hearted man, though, of course, he has to be sharp in carrying out his duty of trying to put down smuggling. Well, I will run in for breakfast now, or my aunt will wonder what has become of me; then I will go straight on board the *Boxer*.

"She is not in yet," Bill said. "She would not start until daylight; and I don't suppose she will be round for another two hours. You see she is not clear of Portland Bill yet."

"That is unfortunate. However, I hope I shall see him before the magistrates sit. What time do they meet?"

"They generally sit at eleven o'clock; but it ain't their day, and they will have to be summoned special. I should not wonder if they don't meet till two o'clock; because they could not be sure what time the *Boxer* will get round, and, as he will have taken some prisoners in the lugger, they would not begin until he arrived."

"Very well; I will go round to the court-house after breakfast, and inquire what time the sitting will be. Anyhow, I hope to be able to see the lieutenant before they meet. I don't know that any good can come of it; for, as he had nothing to do with Julian's capture, he certainly would not be able to save him from appearing, especially after that row with Faulkner."

"He's a bad un that, Master Frank, and I wish your brother had chucked him into that fire. A bit of burning might have done him good; and, if ever a chap deserved it, he did."

Frank went back into the house.

"My dear Frank," Mrs. Troutbeck exclaimed, "where have you been? I have never known you keep breakfast waiting before. Why, what is the matter, dear? Nothing about Julian, I hope; hasn't he come home yet?"

"No, Aunt; and I am sorry to say that he has got into an awkward scrape. It seems that he went out, for the fun of the thing, to see a cargo run. The revenue people came up, and he was one of

those who were caught. Of course he had nothing to do with the smuggling part of the business, nor with a bit of a fight there was. Still, as he was there, I am afraid there is no doubt that he will have to appear before the magistrates with the others."

Mrs. Troutbeck sat in speechless consternation.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" she exclaimed at last. "How could he have been so silly? It is dreadful, my dear, and it will be such a disgrace. What shall we do?"

"There is nothing to do, Aunt, that I can see. As to the disgrace, that is nothing very dreadful. No end of people are mixed up in smuggling; and I have heard that many of the gentry wink at it, and are glad enough to buy a keg of brandy cheap without asking any questions where it comes from. So the mere fact that Julian went to have a look at a cargo being run is not anything very serious. I suppose it was against the law even to be present, but there was nothing disgraceful about it. It is lucky my holidays began last week, and if there is anything to be done I can do it."

"Could not Mr. Downes get him off? He used often to be here in your father's time, though I have not seen much of him since; but I am sure he would do anything he could."

"I have been thinking of that, Aunt. The *Boxer* was there last night and captured the smuggler, but her crew had nothing to do with the fight on shore; and, therefore, I don't think there is any chance of his being able to interfere in the matter. Still, I will see him as soon as the cutter comes in."

On going down to the court-house, Frank found that the magistrates would meet at two o'clock. Then, as the *Boxer* had only just appeared round Portland, he went and saw the chief officer of the coast-guard to endeavour to obtain permission to have an interview with Julian.

"I am sorry I can do nothing in the matter, lad," he replied. "It is out of my hands, owing to a magistrate being present at the capture. It was, indeed, his business more than ours; for it was he who obtained information of the affair, and called upon us to aid him in the capture of men engaged in unlawful practices. Therefore, you see, the prisoners are in the hands of the civil authorities. I hear he has given strict orders that no one is, on any pretence, to speak to the prisoners."

"I hear that he struck my brother."

"I don't know how you heard it, lad, but it is true. However, I do not feel at liberty to say anything about it. I am very sorry for your brother, who is a fine young fellow. However, I hope that as he was unarmed, and was not, I suppose, actually concerned in the smuggling business, the matter will be passed over lightly, even if he is not discharged at once. At any rate, we shall in no way press the case against him."

Frank, indeed, afterwards learned that the officer dropped a hint to the men to make as little as possible of Julian's capture, and of the vigorous resistance he had made when first seized.

The *Boxer* dropped anchor off the town at twelve o'clock, and the lieutenant landed at once. The officer of the coast-guard went down to meet him on the quay, and for half an hour they walked up and down the parade together, in earnest conversation. Frank remained on the opposite side of the road until they stopped, and the commander of the *Boxer* beckoned to him.

"Well, lad," he said, as Frank came up, "this is a nasty scrape that your brother has got into; but I don't think they can do anything to him. Mr. Moorsby has been telling me that you have been to him; but neither he nor I can do anything in the matter – it is in the civil hands. If it had been anyone else but Faulkner who had been in charge, I have no doubt it could have been managed. Of course, your brother ought not to have been there, but as he was only looking on, and taking no active part in the affair, he might have been released without any difficulty. However, I don't think you need worry yourself. Certainly, we shall not press the case against him. It is unfortunate that he used his tongue as sharply as he did to Mr. Faulkner, though I don't say but that he had great provocation, or that what he said was not perfectly true; still, it would have been much better left unsaid. However, I question if before the hearing is over Faulkner will not have cause to regret that he did not let your brother go home as soon as they got back here."

He nodded, and Frank understood that there was no more to say, and, thanking the officer, turned and walked off home. The fisherman met him on the way.

"You keep up your heart, Mr. Frank. Me and some of the others have been having a talk with the coast-guards, and they will be all right. Of course, there is not one of them that does not know Mr. Julian, so they won't say more than they can help against him; and every one of them is glad to hear that he gave it to that Faulkner hot. He ain't no more a favourite with them than he is with other people, and it was not by their own will that they ran in and pulled your brother off him. If they hadn't, he would not have been sitting on the bench to-day, nor for many a week, I reckon; for he would have been pretty badly burned if he had fallen across that fire. So you may be sure that they will make it easy for Mr. Julian, and I expect you will have him back home this evening. They would never have took him at all if they had known who he was; but, of course, being dark, and he in his fishing togs, they did not see it was him."

Frank returned home in much better spirits than he had left. His aunt was standing at the window, and hurried to the door to let him in.

"Well, Frank, have you got him out? I hoped you would have brought him home with you."

"There was no chance of that, Aunt. Of course, when anyone is taken and locked up, he cannot be discharged until the case has been gone into. But I have seen Mr. Moorsby, the coast-guard officer on shore, and Captain Downes, and they both say that the case will not be pressed against him, and that, as he was not taking any part in the affair, and merely looking on, they don't think anything will be done to him. The coast-guardsmen who will have to give evidence all know him, and will not say anything against him if they can help it. So I should not be at all surprised, Aunt, if we have him back here this afternoon."

"Oh, I do wish," Mrs. Troutbeck said tearfully, "that it could have been managed so that he would not have been obliged to be placed in the dock with smugglers and all sorts of people."

"It would, no doubt, have been better if it could have been avoided, Aunt, but there is no helping it; and if he is discharged it won't go for much against him – certainly not here, where nobody regards smuggling as a crime."

At half-past one Frank went down to the court-house. It was already crowded, but Captain Downes, who came up at the same moment, took him in, and obtained a place for him at the solicitors' table. The seizure had created quite a sensation in Weymouth, not only because two or three Weymouth men were among the prisoners, but because, owing to the fight that had taken place, the matter was very much more serious than a mere capture of contraband goods. There was a general buzz of conversation until three magistrates came in and took their places, and there was a little murmur of satisfaction as Colonel Chambers, the chairman, took his seat; for, had he not been present, Mr. Faulkner, who was next in seniority, would have taken the chair. A minute later, twelve prisoners were brought in. Five Frenchmen and two Englishmen were a portion of the crew of the smuggler; two were farmers' men, the drivers of the carts; one was a local fisherman; the eleventh was one of the party that had gone from Weymouth; Julian Wyatt made up the number.

Two or three of the party had their heads bandaged up; one had his arm in a sling; several others had marks of hard knocks, and Julian a pair of black eyes. When the little murmur that followed the entry of the prisoners had subsided, and the crier had called out "Silence in court," the inquiry began.

Mr. Moorsby was the first witness. He deposed that having received information that a landing of contraband goods was likely to take place, he, accompanied by Mr. Faulkner, who represented the civil authorities, went to the spot. They perceived that a landing of goods was taking place; but, as it had been arranged that his party should not show themselves until the revenue cutter came up and seized the lugger, they remained in hiding until they heard from a man placed down by the shore that the cutter was coming in. Then they rushed out and seized the parties engaged in the proceedings. Some of them resisted violently, and a serious fray took place. Three of his men were wounded with

pistol shots, one of them very seriously. One of the smugglers had been killed, and three were so seriously injured that they could not at present be placed in the dock.

"Are any of the prisoners represented in court?" the chairman asked.

A solicitor sitting next to Frank rose. "I represent Mr. Julian Wyatt," he said. Frank looked up at him in surprise. The idea of obtaining legal assistance for Julian had not occurred to him, and he wondered how his brother had been able to communicate with a solicitor. "I would suggest, your honour," the latter went on, "that the evidence should be taken separately in the different charges, as there is a considerable difference in the position of prisoners."

Another solicitor rose. "I appear for John Turnbull and William Sims," he said, "and I would support the appeal of Mr. Probert. My clients, who are farming men, took no part whatever in the fray, which is the serious portion of the affair. While I am ready to admit that they were engaged in the illegal operation of aiding in the landing of contraband goods, I shall be able to prove that they are innocent of the more serious charge of resisting by force their capture by the revenue officers, and with using deadly weapons against the representatives of the law, and that their case stands in an altogether different category to that of the main body of the prisoners."

"You do not intend, I hope," Mr. Faulkner said, "to express a wish that we should have what would practically be twelve investigations instead of one, or that the witnesses should all be obliged to go that number of times into the box."

"By no means, your honour; I am only intimating my intention of cross-examining each witness as to the share my clients took in the affair, and pointing out beforehand that their case stands on an entirely different footing to that of the men who took part in the more serious charge of resisting the officers."

One after another of the coast-guard men gave their evidence, each identifying one or more of the prisoners in whose capture they had taken a personal part. None of the first five had anything to say regarding Julian. Then James Wingfield entered the box. After stating that he was the coxswain of the Weymouth coast-guard boat he proceeded:

"When Mr. Moorsby gave the order I ran forward. I saw a biggish man standing with his hands in the pockets of his pea-jacket. He seemed to be looking on, and was not at work; but, thinking that he might be a leader, me and Harry Wilkens ran at him and seized him. It was not until afterwards we knew that he was Mr. Julian Wyatt. After we had caught him I handed him over to Wilkens, and that is all I know about him."

He then proceeded to testify against several of the other prisoners in whose capture he had taken part. When he had finished his evidence, Julian's solicitor rose.

"You say that the prisoner you first took, Mr. Wyatt, was taking no active part in the affair?"

"No, sir, he was just standing there looking on."

"And did he resist the capture?"

"Not to say resist, sir. When we first clapped hands on him he gave a start, for we had come upon him sudden, without noise. He just tried to shake us off, not knowing, I reckon, who we were; but as soon as I said, 'In the King's name, you are my prisoner,' he was just as quiet as a lamb."

The solicitor sat down. Then the chairman asked the witness if any arms were found on the prisoner.

"No, sir."

"Not even a stick?"

"I won't say as he may not have had a bit of a stick, your honour, though I did not notice it, his hands being in his pockets; anyhow, he did not try to use it."

Wilkens was the next witness, and his evidence, as far as Julian was concerned, was precisely similar to that of the coxswain. Against the seven men of the lugger the evidence was conclusive. All had resisted desperately, and this had enabled several of their party to make their escape in the darkness. The Weymouth fisherman had been caught coming up from the beach with a keg on his

shoulder, and had thrown it down and attempted to run away, but had made no resistance when he had been taken; the two farm men had been captured at their horses' heads, and had at once surrendered. When the evidence had been gone through, Mr. Probert addressed the court on behalf of Julian. He urged that there was no evidence whatever to show that he was concerned either in the smuggling operations or in the resistance to the revenue officers.

"I do not pretend," he said, "that he was there by accident; but I maintain that he was there simply in the capacity of a looker-on. He stands, in fact, precisely in the same position that any member of the general public might do, who had been present as a spectator at any sort of riot. It is unquestionably a very unwise action on the part of any individual to attend a meeting of any sort at which it is possible that riotous proceedings may take place, but I maintain that, however imprudent and foolish, there is nothing criminal in his doing so, and I am sure that there is no case on record in which a man has been punished for his presence at a riot in which he did not participate. My client acted foolishly, but I ask the court to say that his foolishness was not criminal. He had accidentally learned that there was to be a landing of contraband goods, and, with the thoughtlessness of youth, he went to see what he considered the fun. Even if there had been a shadow of criminality in his being present, I should ask you to say that the unpleasant experience that he has undergone – his detention for twelve hours in a police cell, and his appearance here – is ample punishment for his boyish escapade, which might have been committed by any high-spirited young fellow of nineteen."

After the other solicitor had addressed the court on behalf of the two farmers' men, the magistrates consulted together. The spectators, watching them attentively, saw that for a time they seemed unanimous, then it was equally evident that there was a difference of opinion on some point or other, and they presently rose and left the court.

"It is Faulkner against the other two," Mr. Probert whispered to Frank. "Of course they were unanimous about the smugglers, but I expect they differed as to the others. It is lucky that the Colonel is in the chair. Harrington is a mild little fellow, and Faulkner would be able to twist him round his finger if there were only the two of them, but there is no fear of that with the Colonel there to keep him straight."

In ten minutes they returned, and by the flushed, angry face of Mr. Faulkner, Frank judged at once that he had been overruled. The chairman briefly announced the decision of the court, and committed the seven smugglers for trial on the whole of the charges. The Weymouth fisherman was also committed, but only on the charge of being engaged in the unlawful act of defrauding His Majesty's revenue, and was allowed out on bail. The two farm labourers were fined fifty pounds apiece, which their solicitor at once paid.

"The majority of the bench are in favour of your immediate discharge, Mr. Wyatt, being of opinion that the evidence has failed altogether to prove any of the charges against you, and, being of opinion that you have already paid dearly enough for your reckless folly in attending an unlawful operation of this kind, they trust that it will be a lesson to you for life. The other and more serious charge against you will now be taken."

Frank, who was in the act of rising from his seat in delight at Julian's acquittal, sank down again in dismay at the concluding words. He had no idea of any further charge.

"What is it?" he whispered to Mr. Probert.

"Faulkner has charged him with an attempt to murder him. Have you not heard of it? Don't be frightened. I have seen the witnesses, and have no doubt that this case will break down like the other."

After all the prisoners but Julian had been removed from the dock, Mr. Faulkner left the bench and took his seat in the body of the court. The charge was then read over by the clerk, and Mr. Faulkner's name was called; as he stepped into the witness-box, a low hiss ran through the fishermen who formed a large proportion of the spectators.

"Silence!" the chairman said angrily. "If I hear any repetition of this indecent demonstration, I will have the court cleared at once."

Mr. Faulkner then proceeded to give his evidence. "He had," he said, "spoken severely to the prisoner in his quality as a magistrate, upon his taking part in smuggling transactions. At this the prisoner became violently abusive and uttered such murderous threats that he thought he would have struck him, and in self-defence he (the witness) gave him a blow, whereupon the prisoner had sprung upon him like a tiger, had lifted him in his arms, and had carried him bodily towards the fire, and would assuredly have thrown him into it had he not been prevented from doing so by some of the coast-guardsmen."

Mr. Probert rose quietly. "You are a magistrate, Mr. Faulkner, I believe?" Mr. Faulkner gave no reply to the question, and after a little pause the solicitor went on: "Do you consider that, as a magistrate, Mr. Faulkner, it comes within your province to abuse a prisoner unconvicted of any crime?"

"I deny that I abused him," Mr. Faulkner said hotly.

"There is no occasion for heat, sir," Mr. Probert said quietly. "You are in the position of a witness at present and not of a magistrate, and must reply like any other witness. Well, you deny having abused him. Do you consider that calling a gentleman of good standing in this town, the son of a distinguished officer, a loafing young scoundrel, not abuse; or by telling him that six months in one of His Majesty's jails would do him a world of good?"

"I deny that I used those words."

"Well, sir, that is a question of pure credibility. It is possible that I may be in a position to prove to the satisfaction of the bench that you did use them, and many others of an equally offensive character. Mr. Wyatt naturally resented such language, which you had no more right to address to him than you would have to address to me. If a magistrate forgets his position, and abuses a prisoner in the language of a fish-fag, he must expect to be answered in the same way by anyone of spirit. You say that, thereupon, he became abusive and used murderous threats? Now we should like to hear a little more about this. First of all, let us hear the abuse, will you? Tell the court, if you please, Mr. Faulkner, what were the abusive expressions," he added.

"He said, sir, that I was a disgrace to the bench."

There was a general laugh in the court, which was instantly repressed. Mr. Faulkner's eyes ran furiously over the crowded benches.

"I must ask you to look at me, Mr. Faulkner," the solicitor said mildly. "Well, he said that you were a disgrace to the bench. That is scarcely, perhaps, as much a matter of abuse as one of private opinion. What did he say next?"

"He said I was a curse to the whole neighbourhood."

"Again a mere matter of opinion."

"And after that that I was a sneaking, meddlesome, interfering old fox."

There was again a buzz of laughter, mingled with exclamations of "So you are," "He wasn't far wrong;" upon which Colonel Chalmers directed the constable to turn all the offending parties out of court. Some fishermen nearest to the door were hustled out.

"Well, I am afraid that I must admit," Mr. Probert said, "that to call you a meddlesome old fox was abusive, although nothing like so abusive as to call a man a loafing young scoundrel. Now as to the threats."

"He said that I would be brought home one of these days with a bullet in my body."

"That is purely a matter of prophecy, Mr. Faulkner, and not a threat, unless he intended you to understand that it was he who would fire the bullet. Do you mean to tell the court that you had any reason to suppose that this young gentleman, whose reputation is untarnished, and who has never had a charge brought against him except the ridiculous one that has just been dismissed, intended to imply by those words that he himself had any idea of taking your life?"

"It might bear that construction."

"It might bear any construction in the mind of a man determined to see everything in the worst possible light. It is a matter of public notoriety, Mr. Faulkner, that you have received several threatening letters, and that the active part you have taken against poachers and smugglers has caused some feeling against you. Do you not think it likely that when Mr. Wyatt used the words you have repeated he referred to this circumstance?"

"A magistrate who does his duty must necessarily be unpopular with the criminal classes."

"Possibly, Mr. Faulkner, though I have known many magistrates who did their duty and who were by no means unpopular; but you have not answered my question. Do you not think that in saying what he did Mr. Wyatt simply alluded to the fact of your well-known unpopularity, and to the threatening letters that you have received?"

"Possibly he did," Mr. Faulkner admitted reluctantly, "although that was not my impression at the time."

"Well, then, unless there were further threats, as you call them, I think we have disposed of the alleged abuse and the alleged murderous threats. Now we come to the other charge. You thought that he was about to strike you, and in self-defence gave him a blow. What made you think that he was going to strike you?"

"He made a step towards me with a threatening gesture."

"Oh, I dare say that he was angry, but a gentleman who has been called a loafing young scoundrel is somewhat apt to lose his temper. You might even do so yourself, Mr. Faulkner, if so addressed. Well, then, he made a step towards you; thereupon you struck him in the face, and judging from his appearance you struck him pretty hard, and then you say he caught you up and carried you along. It says a good deal for his strength that he was able to do so. Now you say he carried you towards the fire, and would have thrown you upon it had not some of the coast-guardsmen interfered in time. Now, how do you know that that was his intention?"

"I firmly believe that it was so."

"It is not a question of belief. You might believe that he was going to throw you up to the moon. You struggled, I suppose – you would scarcely submit to be carried like a baby – I imagine that is about the long and short of it. But even if he had intended to throw you on the fire, which certainly seems to be merely a matter of your imagination, you can hardly pretend that had he carried out this intention that it would have been murder. Surely with a score of your friends standing by, you would have been hauled out immediately, none the worse except for a few singes and a burn or two. This was not a burning fiery furnace, Mr. Faulkner, but merely a bit of a bonfire from a few sticks that had been set on fire in order to throw a little light on the proceedings."

"I might have been very seriously burnt."

"Well, even supposing that you had been, that is not a question of murder. I presume that you framed this indictment you have charged the prisoner, not with an intention of committing grievous damage upon you, but with murder, and if you now admit that, under the circumstances, death could hardly have resulted by any possibility from this imaginary intention of throwing you on the fire being carried out, it is clear that the charge of murder must drop through. I have no further questions to ask you, though I may have some remarks to make after having heard your witnesses."

CHAPTER III
IN A FRESH SCRAPE

The first witness called by Mr. Faulkner was Captain Downes.

"Will you tell us what you know about this affair?" the chairman said.

"After having captured the smuggler, I took six men and went up to see if I could be of any assistance to Mr. Moorsby, and also to hear whether he had been as successful with his capture as I had. I found that everything was over, and that a fire had been lighted. I was talking to Mr. Moorsby when my attention was excited by loud words between Mr. Faulkner and Mr. Wyatt, with whom I am acquainted. Mr. Faulkner struck him in the face, and there was a scuffle, the prisoner lifting the magistrate, although a much heavier man, completely off his feet. In the course of the scuffle they approached the fire, and being afraid that they might fall into it, I ran up with Mr. Moorsby and some of the men, and pulled them away."

"Did it seem to you, Captain Downes, that the prisoner was carrying Mr. Faulkner straight to the fire?"

"He was certainly going straight in that direction, but whether intentionally or not I am unable to say."

"Do you think that if you and your men had not interfered they would have fallen into the fire?"

"I think they would certainly have done so."

"Do you think that the prisoner intended to throw Mr. Faulkner into the fire?"

"That I cannot say."

"Have you any questions to ask the witness, Mr. Faulkner?" the chairman asked.

"You do not think it likely, I suppose, that the prisoner could have intended himself to tumble into the fire?"

"I should think it very unlikely."

Mr. Faulkner sat down, and Mr. Probert rose.

"You think it very unlikely, Captain Downes, that Mr. Wyatt would deliberately have walked into the fire, and I quite share your opinion; but it has not yet been proved that he was deliberately going towards the fire at all. You say he lifted Mr. Faulkner in his arms. Now it seems to me that, having done so, he would not be able to see at all which way he was going, as Mr. Wyatt's eyes would both be on a level with Mr. Faulkner's chest; moreover, it must be evident that, judging from his present appearance, he could scarcely have seen anything at all, after receiving such a blow. Does it not strike you as being still more likely that, partially blinded as he was, and being unwilling to strike the magistrate in return, however much the latter had forfeited all claim to respect, he closed with him, and in the heat of passion lifted him up and carried him along at random?"

"I think that very likely," the lieutenant replied.

"Had you yourself been struck as the prisoner was struck, Captain Downes, what course do you think it would have been proper for you to pursue?"

"I don't know what would have been proper, but I know what I should have done. Magistrate or no magistrate, I should have knocked my assailant down, or at any rate I should have tried to."

"As a naval man, Captain Downes, you have had some experience of the conduct gentlemen generally observe to their prisoners. I presume that it is not their custom to strike them, even if they did make a somewhat free use of their tongues?"

"Certainly not," Captain Downes said emphatically.

"Would you go so far as to say that you would consider it to be a disgraceful and cowardly act?"

"I should so consider it."

There was again a murmur of applause in court, which was instantly arrested when Mr. Probert held up his hand deprecatingly. "Thank you, Captain Downes," he went on. "Now we come to the question of the quarrel that gave rise to this affair. Mr. Faulkner has not thought fit to ask you any questions about it. Were you standing close enough to hear what passed?"

"I was standing close by, and both Mr. Faulkner and the prisoner spoke loudly enough to be heard at such a distance."

"The magistrate first began the conversation?"

"He did."

"He used very strong language, did he not?"

"Very strong."

"Did you think that he was justified in using such strong language?"

"Certainly not; I thought that it was most improper."

"And do you think that a gentleman accosted so improperly is to be greatly blamed if he uses strong language in return?"

"It would no doubt have been better if he had held his tongue at the time, and have called him to account afterwards."

"Still the provocation was very strong, Captain Downes, and you could not altogether blame him."

"I did not blame him at all," the witness said curtly.

"And what did you think when Mr. Faulkner suddenly struck his prisoner in the face?"

"Am I to answer that question?" the witness asked the bench.

"I do not think that it is an improper question," the chairman replied.

"Very well, sir. Then, if I must say it, I thought it was one of the most blackguardly and cowardly things I ever saw done."

"Thank you, Captain Downes. I do not think it necessary to ask you any further questions."

"Have you any more witnesses to call, Mr. Faulkner?" the chairman asked coldly.

Mr. Faulkner's face was white with rage. "I have a dozen other witnesses," he said hoarsely, "but I have no doubt they will all follow the lead their officer has set them. I shall therefore call no more."

"I do not think, your worships," Mr. Probert said, rising, "that it is necessary for me to address you. I would only submit to you that there is not a shadow of evidence to support the charge of an attempt to murder. As to the abusive language, I cannot say that my client's words were a retort courteous, but they were only a retort natural, and were simply the consequence of the extraordinary conduct of Mr. Faulkner, acting at the time in his capacity of magistrate. As to the charge of threatening language, it is altogether absurd. My client simply asserted what is true by common report – that Mr. Faulkner had been threatened, and that it was possible that those threats might some day or other be carried into effect. I have only, therefore, to leave the case in the hands of your worships."

The two magistrates put their heads together for a short time. Then the chairman said: "The bench is of opinion that the charge of attempted murder is altogether without foundation, and that of abusive language and the use of threats should never have been brought, seeing that they were the result of what we cannot but consider the very ill-judged and improper conduct of the plaintiff. You are therefore discharged, Mr. Wyatt; but my colleague and myself cannot but again express a hope that this and the preceding charge may prove a lesson to you to avoid taking part, even as a spectator, in such breeches of the law as those which led to this very regrettable occurrence."

As the magistrate concluded, a roar of applause rose in the court. In vain the constables shouted for silence. The chairman at once ordered the room to be cleared, and at the same time motioned to Julian not to leave the court, as he was preparing to do. When the court was cleared, he called Julian up to him.

"I think, Mr. Wyatt," he said, "it would be as well for you to remain here for a time, and then go out by the back way. It would be very unfortunate if any demonstration took place. Enough harm has been done already; do not let us make it any worse."

"Certainly not, sir. I am heartily sorry for what has occurred," and beckoning to Frank, who was still seated at the solicitors' table, he retired with him to a waiting-room.

"Thank goodness, Julian, you have got out of that scrape."

"Thank goodness, indeed, Frank. I behaved like an awful fool, but I never dreamt that anything like this would come of it. I have been to see cargoes run several times. It was very good fun. I never helped in any way, and had always made up my mind that I would make myself scarce if the revenue people should turn up, but it all happened so suddenly that I was a prisoner before I knew what was going on. As to the other affair, no doubt it would have been better for me to have said nothing, but of course I knew that he had no right to say what he did, and I had not the least idea that he would hit me; when he did, I went at him in a fury, and I don't mind acknowledging that I did intend to chuck him in the fire – not with any idea of killing him, you know, though I did think he would be burnt a bit."

"It was lucky you sent for Probert, Julian; I had never thought of it."

"No more did I, Frank. I was perfectly astonished when he got up and said that he appeared for me, but I supposed that Aunt or you had sent for him."

"I am sure Aunt didn't, or she would have told me."

"I should not be surprised, Frank, if it were Captain Downes. In the first place, he was a friend of Father's, and in the next place, because he is heartily sick of Faulkner's constant interference and the way he goes on. I expect that if Mr. Moorsby had got up he would have said just the same things."

"I will leave you here for a few minutes, Julian. I must run round and tell Aunt; she is in a fearful stew about you."

Frank ran out at the main entrance. A number of fishermen were hanging about outside. Bill came up to him:

"Isn't Mr. Julian coming out, Master Frank?"

"Not at present. The magistrates don't want any fuss in the streets, no more does my brother, and he will stay there till every one has cleared off, so the best thing you can do, Bill, is to persuade the others to go off home. Julian knows well enough that you are all pleased that he has got off, but you see if there were a fuss got up about it in the streets it would do him harm and not good."

"All right, sir, I will get them off. They just wanted to give him a cheer."

"Well, they did that in Court, Bill, and you know that he appreciates their good intentions. Well, I must be off."

Mrs. Troutbeck was still on the watch. However, she did not come to the door. Frank opened it, and ran into the parlour. His Aunt had dropped into a chair, with her handkerchief to her eyes.

"So he has not come back with you, Frank. It is dreadful. What are they going to do with him?"

"They are not going to do anything, Aunt. He has been acquitted. Only he did not come home with me because there are a lot of sailors waiting outside to cheer him, and the magistrates did not want a row over him, nor did Julian either. I have just run home to tell you that it is all right, and now I am going back for him. I expect by the time I get there they will all have gone, and we may be home in a quarter of an hour, so I think, Aunt, the best thing you can do is to get tea ready, for I don't expect he has had much to eat there, or any appetite to eat it."

It was good advice, for Mrs. Troutbeck was on the point of going into hysterics from joy and relief. However, the thought of the necessity for getting a good meal to welcome Julian on his arrival turned her thoughts into another channel, and, wiping her eyes hastily, she rose and gave directions, while Frank started again for the court-house. The fishermen had left, but there were still a number of boys about the place. The private entrance was, however, free from observers, and the brothers started at once, keeping to the back streets until they neared the house.

"My dear Julian," Mrs. Troutbeck exclaimed as she threw her arms round his neck, "what a relief it is to have you back again. It has been terrible for you."

"It hasn't been very pleasant, Aunt," he replied cheerfully, "but it is all right now, and certainly I ought not to grumble. I have had better luck than I deserved. I was a fool to go there, but I did not think that there was any real chance of the revenue people coming down upon us. It was thought they had been thrown off the scent altogether."

"What a dreadful face you have got, Julian!"

"Oh, that is nothing, Aunt; it will go off in a few days, and until it has I must either stay indoors or keep out of the town altogether."

"I am afraid tea won't be ready for a few minutes, Julian. You see I have had such a very short notice."

"I can hold on comfortably, Aunt; besides, I have got to have a change and a wash. That is of more importance than tea just at present."

After the meal was over, Frank gave the details of the examination, the narrative being very frequently stopped by exclamations and questions on the part of Mrs. Troutbeck.

"I have never heard of such a wicked thing. The idea of that man charging you with attempting to murder him! Julian, he ought to be punished for it."

"I fancy he has been punished, Aunt. I don't see how he is to keep his commission as a justice after what was said in court. Still, it is a bad thing for me. I was discharged, but it will always be against me. If I ever get into any sort of trouble again, people will say: 'Ah, yes; he was charged with attempting murder when he was a young fellow, and although he was lucky enough to get off then, there must have been something in it. He is evidently a man of ungovernable temper.'"

"But, my dear Julian, everyone knows that you have a very sweet temper."

"I was not in a sweet temper then at any rate, Aunt."

"Of course not, Julian. I should not have been so myself if anyone had hit me such a terrible blow as that in the face."

Her nephews both laughed, for they had never seen her ruffled out of her usual serenity.

"Well, Aunt, don't let us talk any more about it," Julian said. "I would give a good deal if it hadn't happened. As it is, one must make the best of it, and I hope that it will be forgotten in time. I wish now that I had gone into the army, but it is too late for that. I shall think over what I had best take to. I should certainly like to get away from here until it has blown over altogether."

On the following morning Frank met Captain Downes, and learned that he was right in his conjecture, and that it was he who had retained Mr. Probert's services in Julian's behalf before the magistrates.

For the next few days Julian kept in the house, except that after nightfall he went out for a long walk. The report of the proceedings in the court had caused a great sensation in Weymouth, and the feeling was so strong against Mr. Faulkner that he was hooted in the streets when he rode into the town. The general expectation was that he would resign his position on the bench; and when at the end of a week he did not do so, a private meeting of the other magistrates was held, and it was whispered in the town that a report of the proceedings at the court had been sent to the Home Secretary, with an expression of opinion that Mr. Faulkner's brother magistrates felt that they could not sit again with him on the bench after what had taken place.

Ten days after the affair Julian started early one morning for a day's rabbit-shooting at the house of a friend who lived some six miles up the valley. Some snow fell in the course of the afternoon and put a stop to shooting, and he started to walk home. When he was within a few hundred yards of Mr. Faulkner's place he heard a horse coming along behind him. The snow that had fallen had deadened the sound of the hoofs on the road, and, looking round, he saw Mr. Faulkner riding fast, at a distance of but fifty yards away. Had he caught sight of him sooner Julian would have left the road and entered the wood to avoid him, but it was too late now, and he hoped that at any rate the man would pass on

without speaking. The horseman had apparently not recognized Julian until he came abreast of him, when, with a sudden exclamation, he reined in his horse.

"So it is you, Julian Wyatt?" he said, in a tone of suppressed fury.

"It is I, Mr. Faulkner," Julian replied quietly; "and as I don't want to have anything to say to you, I think that you had better go on your way without interfering with me."

"Mark my words, you young scoundrel, I will be even with you yet."

"The debt is not all on your side, Mr. Faulkner. I, too, have got a debt to pay; and perhaps some day we may square matters up, when you have not got a score of coast-guardsmen at your back. However, I am content to leave matters as they are so long as you do the same. As to your owing a debt to me, it is yourself you have to thank for the trouble you have got into; it was no doing of mine. However, I warn you that you had better abstain from insulting me again. I did not strike you back when you hit me last time, but if you call me scoundrel again you shall see that I can hit as hard as you can, and I will teach you to keep a civil tongue in your head."

"You mark my words," Mr. Faulkner repeated. "I will have you watched, and I will hunt you down, and if I am not mistaken I will put a rope round your neck one of these days." So saying, he struck spurs into his horse and galloped on.

Julian stood looking after him until he saw him turn in at his gate. The drive to the house led, as he knew, diagonally through the wood, and as he walked forward he heard the horse's galloping hoofs grow louder and louder. Suddenly there was the report of a gun some seventy or eighty yards away. It was mingled with that of a sudden cry, and Julian heard the horse galloping on even faster than before. With an exclamation of "Good heavens! something has happened!" he broke through the hedge and ran in the direction of the sound. As he approached it he thought that he caught sight of a man running through the trees, but he kept straight on until he came upon the drive. Twenty yards away Mr. Faulkner lay stretched on the ground. He went up to him, and stooped over him. His eyes were closed, and as he lay on his back Julian saw blood oozing through a bullet-hole in his coat high up on the left side of the chest.

Feeling sure that Mr. Faulkner was dead he started up, and without a moment's hesitation ran into the wood again, in the direction where he had thought that he had seen a figure. A minute later he came upon some footprints on a bare spot between the trees, where the snow had fallen lightly. Noting the direction they took, he followed at once. He saw no more signs of footprints, but followed the direction as nearly as he could until he came to the farthest side of the wood; then he leaped out into the field beyond, and followed the edge of the wood until he again reached the road. He then turned and went back again, and fifty yards from the point where he had first run out he came upon the footprints again.

"He was going to take to the hills, he muttered," as he set off along the track. He ran at a trot, and as he went, loaded both barrels of his gun. "Very likely the villain will show fight," he said to himself; "I must take him by surprise if I can."

After a quarter of a mile's run he reached the foot of the hill, and near its crest, three-quarters of a mile away, caught sight of the figure of a man. A moment later he had passed over the crest. Julian started at full speed up the hill. There was no need to follow the footprints now; indeed the strong wind that was blowing had swept the snow into the hollows, and the face of the hill was bare. When he reached the top of the hill he had decreased his distance considerably. He saw to his surprise that the man was bearing to the right, a course that would ere long bring him to the edge of the cliff. The run up the hill had left him breathless, and for some time the man, who was also running, fully maintained his lead. Then Julian began to gain upon him. The man had again changed his course, and was now going parallel with the line of cliffs. Three miles from the point where he had reached the top Julian was within a quarter of a mile of him. He would have caught him before this, had he not been obliged at times to make detours so as to avoid passing high ground, where the man, if he looked back, would have perceived him. By this time he was almost sure that the fugitive was a poacher,

who had been recently released from a term of two years in prison for poaching in Mr. Faulkner's preserves. At last he saw him turn sharp to the right again. "Where on earth is he going?" Julian said to himself. "The cliffs are not many hundred yards away."

Hitherto he had supposed that the man was keeping away from the cliff to avoid meeting any of the coast-guards who would be on duty there, but this change of direction puzzled him completely. Keeping his eye on the poacher, he saw him enter a small clump of bushes, from which he did not emerge. Julian at once slackened his pace down to a walk. It was likely enough that the man had noticed that he was being pursued, and had determined to rid himself of the pursuer. It was not a pleasant idea, that the fellow might now be kneeling among the bushes with his gun at his shoulder.

"It could hardly be that either," he said to himself, "for if he intended to shoot me he would have turned the other way; for the sound of his gun would be probably heard by some of the coast-guard, and they could not fail to see him running away. At any rate," he muttered, "I am not going to turn back after such a chase as I have had."

Standing still and looking at the spot, he saw that the clump of bushes grew in a slight hollow, and that by turning to the right he would be able to approach within twenty or thirty yards of it without exposing himself to view. This he did, and in a short time lost sight of the bushes. Moving with great caution, he made his way towards them, and when he approached the slope into the hollow, lay down and crawled along, keeping his gun in front of him. As he neared the spot he lay down on his stomach in the short turf and wound himself along until he could see down into the bushes. With his gun at his shoulder, and his finger on the trigger, he gazed down into the hollow. To his surprise he could see no signs of the fugitive. The leafless boughs afforded but slight shelter, and after gazing fixedly at them for two or three minutes, he became convinced that the man was no longer there. As soon as he came to this conclusion he stood up and looked over the surrounding country. It was bleak and bare, and entirely destitute of hedges or any other shelter.

It was but for five or six minutes at the utmost that he had lost sight of the bushes, and in that time the man could not have got far. "Where on earth has he hidden himself?" Julian muttered.

He went down to the clump of bushes, still holding his gun in readiness for instant use. The patch was but some thirty feet long by half as wide. He walked backwards and forwards among the low bushes, but the fugitive was certainly not there. Going to the end of the patch he could see plainly enough the track where the man had entered, for although there was little snow on the top of the ground it lay among the tufts of grass. He walked round the clump, but there were no signs of any footsteps leaving it. "This is the rummest thing I ever saw," he muttered; "the fellow can't have flown away; yet, he certainly has not walked off."

Thinking it over, an idea suddenly occurred to him. When sailing along the coast with Bill, the latter had one day pointed out to him a hole in the cliff some twenty feet above high-water mark. "Do you see that hole, Mr. Julian?"

"Yes, I see it plain enough. What of it?"

"Well, sir, if I owned all the goods that have been taken into that hole on dark still nights I should be a rich man."

"Do you mean to say that they run cargoes there, Bill?"

"Not kegs – they are too heavy and too awkward to get away – but laces, and silks, and such like. Many a lugger when she comes from abroad lands all them sorts of things here, and then sails away and takes her chance of running the rest of the cargo somewhere else."

"But how can anyone get up there? I see nothing like a path."

"There ain't no path, sir. The revenue men would have found it out long ago if there had been. The boat comes along, as I said, of a dark night, when there is no swell on, and the chaps inside show a tiny light to guide them to the spot. When the boat comes, they lower a rope down and haul the bales up; and then the boat goes back to the lugger, and she ups sail, and no one is the wiser."

"But what do they do with the stuff? I don't mean, where do they stow it, but how do they get it away?"

"There is a passage somewhere," Bill replied. "I don't know where it goes out. I reckon there ain't half a dozen men in Weymouth who do know. I should say, except the men whose business it is to take the goods inland and forward them to London, there is only one chap who is in the secret; and he is not in Weymouth now – he is in jail. That is Joe Markham. He is in for poaching. But for a good many years he sailed in one of those French luggers. Then, as I have heard, he was keeper of the cave for a bit; but he had to give it up – he was too well known to the coast-guard, and they kept too sharp an eye on him for him to venture to go out. He had had enough of the sea, and no doubt he had got some money laid by; anyhow, he took a cottage by the river, and took to poaching, more for devilment, I should say, than because he wanted the money. I expect he was well paid by the smugglers, for he used to get up half the stories to put them off the scent, and never missed being present when a run was made."

This conversation came back to Julian's memory, as he stood by the clump of bushes wondering what had become of the man that he had pursued, and it flashed upon him that the spot where he was standing could not be far from the smugglers' cavern, and that the entrance to this might very well be among these bushes. The man knew where that entrance was, and nothing was more likely than that he should make for it as a place of concealment until an opportunity occurred to get on board a lugger and cross the channel. It was a very likely place; men could come and go at night without risk of being seen or heard by any of the coast-guardsmen on the cliff, and would not be likely to encounter anyone within two or three miles of it. Years might pass without anyone happening to enter the bushes.

Laying down his gun, Julian began to search in earnest. It was half an hour before, feeling about in the coarse grass, he came upon a handle. He pulled at it, gently at first, then as it did not yield, he exerted his strength, and it gave way, and a section of the rough herbage rose, while three feet away it sank in the same proportion. Raising it higher, he saw that the trap-door – for such it was – was two feet wide by about five feet long and eighteen inches deep; it was, in fact, a deep tray pivoted on the centre and filled with earth, on which grass grew as freely as in the ground adjoining.

The greater portion of the trap was overhung by bushes, which grew so thickly around the part which sank that the probability was small indeed that anyone would tread upon it. Julian saw, too, that under the handle was a bolt that, when fastened, would hold the trap firmly down. No doubt the man in his haste had forgotten to fasten it before he descended. Looking down, Julian saw a circular hole like a well, evidently artificially made in the chalk; a ladder was fastened against one side.

Julian hesitated. Should he return to Weymouth, inform the authorities that he had traced the murderer of Mr. Faulkner to a place of concealment, and bring them there to arrest him, or should he go down and encounter him single-handed? Although of a fearless disposition, he would have decided on the more prudent course had it not been that to have done so, would have let the authorities into the knowledge of the smugglers' cave. Although he had determined to have nothing more to do with them, this he felt would be an act of treachery, for it was only because he had been believed by Bill to be absolutely trustworthy, that the latter had told him of the existence of this cavern and of the secret exit, and without that information he would never have searched for and discovered the trap-door. Then, too, the thought that the credit he would gain by the capture of the murderer single-handed would go far to efface the memory of the disgrace that had befallen him, helped to decide him.

He fetched his gun and slung it over his shoulder, got upon the ladder, and pulled the trap-door down behind him. As he did so he found that it moved easily, and that he could push it up again without any difficulty, and feeling the bolt, discovered that it had been partially shot, but not sufficiently to catch fairly, although containing so far a hold of the frame, that it had torn a groove in the somewhat rotten wood with the force that he had used to raise it. He went down the ladder very cautiously, until, after descending for some thirty steps, his foot encountered solid ground. After a moment's consideration he knelt down and proceeded on his hands and knees. Almost immediately

he felt the ground slope away in front of him. He got on to his feet again. Holding out his arms he found that the passage was about four feet wide, and he began to descend with extreme care, feeling his way along both walls. He had gone, he thought, about fifty yards when the passage made a sharp turn, still descending, and at a considerable distance ahead the light streamed in through a rugged hole. He walked more confidently now, and soon the light was sufficient to enable him to see the path he was following.

On arriving at the aperture, he saw that, as he expected, he was looking over the sea. On one side of the hole there was a shelf cut in the chalk. This was stained as if by oil, and he guessed at once that it was a look-out and a spot for signalling a craft in the offing. The path here turned again and ran parallel with the face of the cliff. There was no occasion to exercise care in walking now, as here and there the light streamed in through openings a few inches long. He now unslung his gun, stooped and took off his boots, and then proceeded noiselessly. The descent was considerable, and in some places steps had been cut. At last he arrived at a door. It was roughly but very solidly made, and would doubtless sustain an attack for some time before it yielded, and so would give time to the occupants, in case the trap-door was discovered, to make their escape by the lower entrance on to the beach. There was a latch to it. Lifting this quietly, he found the door yielded, and, holding his gun in his right hand ready to cover the fugitive the moment he entered, Julian threw the door wide open and sprang forward.

He had not calculated on a further descent, but the floor of the cave was five feet below him, and he fell heavily upon it, the gun going off as it struck the floor. Instantaneous as the fall had been, his eyes had taken in the scene. Several lanterns faintly lit up the cave; while in the centre a table, at which several figures were sitting, was illuminated by three or four candles. He was partly stunned by the heaviness of his fall, but vaguely heard shouts of surprise and alarm, and was, a minute later, roughly seized and dragged along. Then he felt that he was being tightly bound. For some minutes he was left to himself, but he could see three men with guns in their hands standing near the door by which he had entered, listening attentively. Presently he heard steps coming down the passage and two other men came through the door, shut and bolted it carefully, and then came down the steps into the cabin.

They spoke to their comrades as they came in, and the news was evidently satisfactory, for the men leaned their guns against the wall and came to the table. There was some talk for a few minutes, and then Julian was raised and placed in a sitting position on the head of a cask by the table. One of the men then addressed him in French. Julian, who by this time had recovered from the effects of his fall, shook his head. The other then spoke to the poacher, who had seated himself opposite Julian, and the latter then said:

"You are the young fellow who was tried in court three weeks ago, are you not?"

"Yes, I am."

"I thought so; I was there. It was the very day I got to Weymouth. Well, what the deuce are you doing here? You are the chap who has followed me all the way up the hill?"

Julian nodded.

"What did you follow me for?"

"Because I was in the road when you shot Faulkner. I heard the gun, and ran in and found him dead. I caught sight of you in the wood, and went in chase of you."

"What did you intend to do, you young fool?"

"I intended to capture you," Julian said fearlessly.

"What for? I have done you a good service as well as myself. You had no reason to bear him any good-will, and some of the men who were there told me that though Downes got you off, it was true that you were going to throw Faulkner into the fire."

"So I was; but he had just struck me and I was in a furious passion; but that was a different thing altogether to shooting a man in cold blood."

"He got me two years' imprisonment," the man said, "which to my mind was a good reason for shooting him when I got the chance; and another thing was he would never leave us alone, but was always on our heels. There are two or three men in prison now that he got sent there, and eight more are waiting their trial. He made war on us, and I have turned the tables on him.

"I heard that you had been at several of the runs, and of course you are in with some of our fellows. How did you get to know about the entrance to this place?"

"I only knew that there was a cave here, that it was used by the smugglers, and that it had an entrance somewhere. The man who told me knew well that I was to be trusted, but it was only because you disappeared among those bushes, and that there were no footprints to show that you had left them, that it appeared to me that the passage might be there, and so I looked about until I found the handle to the trap-door."

"Why didn't you go and call the coast-guard? There was a station not a quarter of a mile away."

"Because I could not have done that without betraying the secret of the cavern. I found the entrance myself, but I should never have done so, if I had not been told about the cave and the secret passage, and I felt that it would be an act of treachery to betray it."

"And you were really fool enough to think that if you captured me single-handed I should walk with you like a lamb to the gallows?"

"I didn't intend to give you a chance of making a fight. I intended to rush straight in and covered you with my gun."

"Well, you have plenty of pluck, young fellow, if you haven't much wisdom; but if you think that after getting in here, I shall let you go out again to bring the constables down on me you are mistaken altogether."

CHAPTER IV
THE SMUGGLER'S CAVE

Joe Markham had, as soon as he arrived, told the French smugglers that he had shot the magistrate who had for the last five or six years given them so much trouble and caused them so much loss, and who had, as the last affair showed, become more dangerous than ever, as he could only have obtained information as to the exact point of landing by having bribed someone connected with them.

"It was a case of his life or our business," he said. "If he had not been got out of the way we must have given up the trade altogether on this part of the coast; besides, he has been the cause, not only of several seizures of cargoes, but of the death of eight or ten of our comrades and of the imprisonment of many others. Now that he is out of the way we shall find things a great deal easier."

"It served him right," the leader of the party said, "and you have rendered good service; but what are you going to do? Do you think that any suspicion will fall upon you?"

"Yes; I have put myself in an awkward position, I am afraid. I thought that the job had been so well managed that it could never be traced to me, but when I got up to the top of the hill I saw a fellow just starting from the bottom. I did not think much of it at the time, but he came up so quickly after me that he must have run all the way up. He has chased me hard, and as he got nearer I could see that he had a gun too. He was not more than a quarter of a mile away when I got to the trap-door."

"Why didn't you hide yourself in the bushes and put a bullet into him, Markham?"

"For several reasons. In the first place, the gun might have been heard by some of those cussed revenue men. Then there would be an inquiry and a search. They would have seen by the direction he had been going, that he must have been shot from the bushes, and as no one would have been in sight when they ran up, the thing would have been such a puzzle to them that you may be sure they would have suspected there must be some hidden way out of the clump. Besides, they would probably have hunted every inch of the ground to see if they could find anything that would give them a clue as to who had fired the shot. That is one reason."

"And quite good enough without any others," the Frenchman said.

"Well, there was another one that went for almost as much with me. I shot down Faulkner because he was a curse to us all. He had imprisoned several of my pals, and done a lot of damage to the trade, and was likely to break it up altogether, besides which I had a big grudge against him on my own account. But I should not have liked to shoot down this fellow in cold blood. I had no feeling against him; he has done me no harm; I did not even know who he was. If he had overtaken me in the open, you may be sure that I should have made a fight of it, for it would have been my life against his. I don't pretend to be soft; there is little enough of that about me, and I have fought hard several times in the old days when we were surprised; but I could not have shot down that fellow without giving him a chance of his life. If there had not been the trap-door to escape by I should have stood up, given him fair warning, and fought it out man to man. As it was – " at this point the conversation had been arrested by the sudden entrance of Julian.

"Who is he?" the chief of the smugglers asked Joe when he had finished his conversation with the prisoner. "Is he a spy?"

"No; he is a young chap as lives down in the town. He is a pal of some of our friends there, and has been with them at the landings of goods. He was caught in that last affair, but got off because they could not prove that he was actually engaged in the business. He is an enemy of Faulkner's too; they had a row there, and Faulkner hit him in the face. You can see the mark still; and he would have thrown Faulkner on to the bonfire they had lit if he had not been prevented by some of the coast-guards. It is through what he had heard from our friends of this cavern, and there being an entrance

to it somewhere, that he came to look for the trap-door. I certainly pushed the bolt forward when I came down, but I was in a hurry, so I suppose it could not have caught rightly."

"Well, what is to be done, Joe?"

"I don't know. You see he knows about my shooting Faulkner. I would trust him not to peach about this cavern or the trap-door, but I don't know as I would about the other thing. It seems to me that he is just as likely to be suspected of having a hand in it as I am. His row with Faulkner is the talk of the place, and when Faulkner is found with a bullet in him, he will be the first fellow to be suspected. Well, if that was so, and you see he would not be able to account for himself for three or four hours afterwards, he might be driven to peach on me to save his own life, and he would be obliged to give all the story about following me and coming down here. There would be an end of the best hiding-place in the country, and I should not be able to show my face on this side of the Channel again."

"I should say the safest plan would be to cut his throat and chuck him into the sea, and have done with it."

"No, I won't have that," the poacher said positively. "Your lugger will be in to-night, and we will take him across with us to France."

"That is all very well," one of the men said; "but what is to prevent his coming back again?"

"We could prevent it somehow or other. We could get up a tale that he was an English sailor we had picked up at sea, and hand him over to the authorities, and tell them his story was, that he had fallen overboard from an English ship of war. Then they would send him away to some place in the interior where they keep English prisoners of war, and there he might lie for years; perhaps never get back again. He does not know a word of French, as you saw when you spoke to him, so he can't contradict any story we may tell, and if by chance any questions should be asked, I can just say what suits us."

"He might ruin us all if he came back," the smuggler growled.

"It ain't likely that he will come back," the poacher said. "I have heard that they die off like flies in those prisons of yours; and, besides, I will guarantee if he does, he will never split about this place. He is a gentleman, and I will get him to swear to me, and you may be sure he will not break his oath."

"But how about yourself?"

"Well, as he won't come back for some years, I will take my chance of that. He has got no evidence against me; it would be his word against mine. He would tell his story and I should tell mine, and mine would be the most likely. I should say I met him on the hills with his gun, and, knowing who I was, and what cause I had got to hate Faulkner, he told me that he had shot him, and asked me to get him on board a smuggler craft and across the Channel, and that I had done so: and that is all I should know about it. No, I am not afraid of anything he might say when he comes back again."

Julian had watched the speakers anxiously during this conversation. He was wholly ignorant of French, but from the tone and manner of the speakers, he gathered that the poacher was speaking in his favour. He had expected no mercy; his life was nothing to these French smugglers; and he was surprised to find the man, whose life he thought he held in his hand if released, apparently pleading his cause.

"Look here, young fellow!" the poacher said, turning towards him. "In the first place, these men are afraid that you may betray the existence of this place, and their opinion is that the best thing to make us safe would be to cut your throat and throw you out of the mouth of the cave into the sea. I told them that you knew of the cave from one of our friends, and could be trusted to keep the secret; at any rate they demand, in the first place, that you shall take an oath never to split about it."

"I will do that willingly enough," Julian said, with a great feeling of relief.

Joe Markham then dictated a terrible oath, which had been always taken by all those made acquainted with the existence of the cave, and this Julian repeated after him. The poacher then told the smugglers what Julian had sworn to.

"Now, young fellow, I may tell you that we are going to take you over to France to-night. You may think I shall be asking you to take another oath, like that, not to say anything against me, but I ain't going to. I shot the man, and I don't pretend to be sorry for it. He was a hard, bad chap, and he got what he deserved. I owed him a long score, not only for myself, but for others, and if I had not shot him, someone else would have done so sooner or later. I shall do what I can to prevent you coming back here, though I don't think you will say anything against me when you do come back. In the first place, like enough I shall take to the sea again, and may be settled in France before you return. In the next place, I may be dead; and, most of all, you have got no evidence against me. If I were here, and you told the story, of course I should say that it was a lie, and that you had shot the man yourself, and I had got you out of the way by sending you across to France in a lugger, so I think you will see that it is best to keep a quiet tongue in your head; anyhow I am ready to take my chance of it."

"They will be horribly alarmed when I don't get home to-night," Julian said.

"Well, they must be alarmed," the poacher said carelessly. "You have interfered in this business, which was none of yours, and you have got to take the consequences; you may think yourself a lucky fellow that you are not by this time drifting about on the tideway."

"I feel that," Julian said; "and though I did not understand a word of what you said, I am sure that it was owing to you that I am not there. I could not have promised that I would never say a word to anyone about you, because one can never tell how one may be placed; but, after what you have done, I think that I can safely promise that I will never go out of my way to denounce you."

"I don't want any promise about it," the poacher replied. "I have made up my mind to leave Weymouth, for, after having been in jail two years, I shall always have the constables as well as the revenue men keeping their eye on me, so I had intended all along to take to the lugger again, and live on board her as I did before, and I only stayed here until I could settle accounts with Faulkner. I have no doubt that they will suspect me of this business. There are plenty of men who know that I had sworn to be even with him, and my disappearance is sure to be put down to that. Now, in the next place, will you promise not to try to escape, because if you do, I will get them to take these ropes off you? I dare say you have been thinking that if you could get free you would make a run for the mouth of the cave and dive in, for it is about high water now."

Julian had, in fact, been thinking so, but as he saw that unless he gave his promise he would have to remain in the cords that were cutting into his wrists, he at once took the required oath. Joe told the Frenchmen, and they then unfastened Julian's cords.

"We may as well carry up the bales at once," their leader said, "before it gets dark. It is no use giving anyone at sea a chance of seeing a light. Tell him to take one and come up with us. I am not going to leave him here by himself, promise or no promise."

The poacher translated the order to Julian. Some bales were taken out from beneath a tarpaulin at the end of the cave, and, each shouldering one, they proceeded up the passage until they reached the foot of the ladder. Here they laid the bales down, and then returned to the cave.

"Is that all?" Julian asked.

"Yes, those bales are worth a lot of money. There is fifteen hundred pounds worth of lace in one of them. The others are silks and satins, and worth another five hundred. To-night, when we hear the signal, I and three of the Frenchmen will go up. We shall find two men there, and shall carry the bales to a place a mile and a half away, where they will be hidden until it is convenient to send them up to London, or wherever they are going to dispose of them – that is their business; ours is finished when they hand us over the money for them. They will come at eight o'clock, and at ten the lugger will be off the coast here and send a boat ashore for us. So you have got five or six hours yet, and I should say the best thing you can do is to turn in and sleep till then. There are plenty of blankets in that corner and a pile of sheep-skins that you can sleep on."

Julian nodded, threw two or three of the sheep-skins down in a corner, rolled another up for a pillow, drew a blanket over him, and for the first time looked round the cave. It was lighted only

by a small hole used as a look-out; at present a blanket hung before this. There was a door similar to that by which he had entered from above leading to the lower cave. How far that lower entrance might be below them Julian had no means of knowing, but from the view he had obtained of the sea through a large loop-hole he had passed in his descent, he did not think that the cavern he was in could be less than seventy or eighty feet above the water. The sole ventilation, as far as he could see, was the current of air that found its way in through the door from below, and passed up through that above, and what could come in through the loop-hole seawards. Doubtless in warmer weather both the doors stood open, but were now closed more for warmth than for any other purpose, although he had noticed that the lower one had been bolted and locked after he had been first captured.

As he lay down he wondered how it was all going to end. His position was at once perilous and uncertain. He had, so far, escaped better than he could have expected, for from the looks the Frenchmen had given him, he had no doubt what his fate would have been had not the man he had been chasing spoken in his favour. His life therefore seemed for the present safe, but the future was very dark. The poacher had spoken as if he was not likely to return for some years. They surely could not intend to keep him on board ship all that time. Could they mean to put him upon some vessel sailing abroad? What a way Frank and his aunt would be in! They would learn that he had started for home early in the afternoon, and it would be absolutely certain that he could not have strayed from the road nor met with any accident coming along the valley. It would certainly be awkward his being missed on the same day Faulkner had been shot, especially as, according to the time he had started for home, he would have come along the road somewhere about the time the magistrate was shot.

It was a horrible thought that suspicion might fall upon him. Those who knew him would be sure that he could have had nothing whatever to do with the murder; still, the more he thought of it the more he felt that suspicions were certain to rise, and that he would find it extremely difficult to explain matters on his return. The memory of his quarrel with the magistrate was fresh in everybody's mind, and even his friends might well consider it singular that his words to Faulkner should so soon have been carried into effect. It is true that Joe Markham would be missing too, and that the man's own acquaintances would have no great difficulty in guessing that he had carried out his threats against Faulkner, but they would certainly not communicate their opinion to the constables, and the latter might not think of the man in connection with the murder, nor notice that he was no longer to be seen about the town.

Even were he himself free to leave the cave now and return to Weymouth, he would find himself in a most awkward position. There was, of course, no shadow of evidence against him save that he was known to have quarrelled with Faulkner, and must have been very near the spot the moment he was killed, but how could he explain six or seven hours' absence? He could but say that he had caught sight of a man in the plantation and followed him for miles among the hills, and had lost sight of him at last. He had not a shadow of evidence to produce in confirmation of his story; in fact there was no direct evidence either way. There could be no doubt he would have to remain under a cloud of suspicion. It was bad enough before, but this would be altogether intolerable, and it was perhaps best, after all, that he was to be taken away, and his future decided for him.

He should have gone anyhow, and no doubt he would be able to get some opportunity of writing to Frank and setting his mind at rest as to his safety, and telling him something about what had happened, and that he had been kidnapped and carried over to France. He had acted like a fool, no doubt, but Frank would understand why he had followed his first impulse and gone alone after the man who committed the murder, instead of going to the constables and telling them that some unknown man had killed the magistrate. One thing seemed certain, he should never be able to go back to Weymouth again unless the affair was cleared up, and he did not see how that ever could be.

At this point Julian's thoughts became confused. The voices of the men talking at the table seemed to get further and further away, and then he was conscious of nothing more until he heard a bell tinkle faintly somewhere overhead. There was a movement in the cave, and he sat up. All the

men went out by the upper door. When they had left he got up and went to see if the lower door was so fastened that he could not open it. He had no idea of breaking his word, but did so out of curiosity rather than from any other feeling. He found that the bolts could be pulled back, but that the lock was a very strong one, and the jamb was, at the point where the bolt shot into it, covered with a piece of iron, so that no instrument could be used for forcing back the bolt.

"It may be," he thought, "that some other prisoner has been confined here at some time or other, or possibly this has been done in order that if the trap-door above should be found, and the revenue men come down that way, the smugglers in their flight might lock the door behind them and so have time to get away in a boat or along at the foot of the cliffs before their pursuers could get down to the lower entrance and open fire upon them."

Then he lay down again. He wondered whether the pull of the bell he had heard could be hidden in the grass like the handle of the trap. It might only be a very small knob, but he had looked so closely among the bushes that he wondered it had escaped him. In three or four minutes the French captain came down again, and walked across to where he was lying:

"*Pauvre diable!*" he muttered, and then went back to the table, filled himself a glass of spirits and water, and lit his pipe. A moment later a thought seemed to strike him, and he came across to Julian again and touched him. He at once sat up. The Frenchman motioned him to come to the table, went to a cupboard, brought out a wooden platter with a large lump of cold beef and a loaf of bread and some cheese, poured him out a horn of brandy and water, and motioned him to eat. Julian attacked the food vigorously. He had had some lunch with his friends before starting for his walk back to Weymouth, but that had been nearly seven hours before, and his run across the hills in the keen air had given him a sharp appetite, so he did full justice to the food.

"This is not a bad fellow after all," he said to himself, as the smuggler, when he had finished, brought out a box of cigars and placed it before him. "He would have knocked me on the head without compunction, in the way of business; but now when he has concluded that I am not dangerous, he comes out as a good fellow." He nodded pleasantly to the Frenchman as he lit the cigar, which was an excellent one, and far better than any Julian had been accustomed to smoke with his associates in the billiard room.

The Frenchman's thoughts were not dissimilar to his own. "He is a brave *garçon*," he said to himself, "and makes the best of things. He is a fine-looking fellow, too, and will be a big man in another year or two. It is a misfortune that we have got to take him and shut him up in prison. Why did he mix himself up in this affair of Markham? That is the way with boys. Instead of being grateful to the man that had killed his enemy, he must needs run after him as if he had done him an injury. Well, it can't be helped now; but, at least, I will make him as comfortable as I can as long as he is on board the lugger."

In another half hour Joe Markham returned with the French sailors. "There is a big stir down in Weymouth," he said to Julian. "I heard from our friend that the place is like a hive of bees. I tell you, Mr. Wyatt, that it is a lucky thing for you that you found the trap-door and came down here. You mayn't like being our prisoner; but it is a lot better than being in a cell down in Weymouth with a charge of murder hanging over you, which you would have been if you had gone straight back again."

"A charge of murder!" Julian repeated, springing to his feet. "How could such a charge be brought? It could not have been known so soon that I was missing. I must go back and face it. If I run away, now I have been openly accused, everyone will make sure of my guilt."

"Well, sir, I should say it is a sight better that they should suspect you, and you safely over in France, than that they should suspect you with you in their hands; but at any rate, you see you have no choice in the matter. You could only clear yourself by bringing me into it; though I doubt, as things have turned out, that that would help you a bit."

"I warn you that I shall make my escape, and come back again as soon as I can," Julian said passionately.

"Well, sir, if you have a fancy for hanging, of course you can do so; but from what I hear, hanging it would be, as sure as you stand there. There is a warrant out against you, and the constables are scouring all the country."

"But what possible ground can they have to go upon except that smuggling affair?"

"Well, if what our friend told me is true, they have very good grounds, as they think, to go on. He was talking with one of the constables, and he told him that Faulkner is not dead yet, though he ain't expected to last till morning. His servants came out to look for him when the horse came back to the house without him. A man rode into Weymouth for the doctor, and another went to Colonel Chambers and Mr. Harrington. By the time they got there Faulkner was conscious, and they took his dying deposition. He said that he had had a row with you a short distance before he had got to his gate, and that you said you would be even with him. As he was riding up through the wood to his house, he suddenly heard a gun and at the same moment fell from his horse. A minute later you came out from the wood at the point where the shot had been fired. You had a gun in your hand. Feeling sure that your intention was to ascertain if he was done for, and to finish him off if you found that he was not, he shut his eyes and pretended to be dead. You stooped over him, and then made off at full speed. Now, sir, that will be awkward evidence to get over, and you must see that you will be a long way safer in France than you would in Weymouth."

Julian sank down, crushed by the blow. He saw that what the poacher said was true. What would his unsupported assertion go for as against the dying man's deposition? No doubt Faulkner had stated what he believed to be the truth, though he might not have given quite a fair account of what had taken place in the road; still, there would be no cross-examining him as to what had passed there, and his statement would stand unchallenged. As things now stood, Julian's own story that he had pursued a man over the hills, and had lost him, would, wholly unsupported as it was, be received with absolute incredulity. He had been at the spot certainly at the time. He had had words with Faulkner; he had had a gun in his hands; he had come out and leaned over the wounded man within less than a minute of the shot being fired. The chain of evidence against him seemed to be complete, and he sat appalled at the position in which he found himself.

"Look here, youngster," the poacher said, "it is a bad job, and I don't say it isn't. I am sorry for you, but I ain't so sorry as to go and give myself up and get hung in your place; but I'll tell you what I will do. When I get across to France I will draw up a statement and swear it before a magistrate, giving an account of the whole affair, and I will put it in a tin case and always carry it about with me. I will direct it to Colonel Chambers, and whenever anything happens to me it shall be sent to him. I am five-and-twenty years older than you are, and the life I lead ain't likely to give me old age. To make matters safer, I will have two copies made of my statement – one I will leave in the hands of one of our friends here. The craft I am in may be wrecked some day, or sunk by one of the cutters; anyhow, whichever way it comes, he is certain to hear of my death, and I shall tell him that when he hears of it he is to send that letter to Chambers."

"Thank you," Julian said earnestly. "It may not come for a long time, but it will be something for me to know that some day or other my name will be cleared of this horrible accusation; but I would rather have gone and faced it out now."

"It would be just suicide," the man said. "Weymouth ain't the only place in the world; and it is better for you to live out of it, and know you will get cleared some day, than to get hung, with only the consolation that perhaps twenty years hence they may find out they have made a mistake."

"It isn't so much myself I am thinking of as my brother and aunt. My going away and never sending them a word will be like confessing my guilt. It will ruin my brother's life, and kill my aunt."

"Well, I'll tell you what I will do," Markham said. "You shall write a letter to your brother, and tell him your story, except, of course, about this cave. You can say you followed me, and that I and some smugglers sprang on you and captured you, and have carried you across to France. All the rest you can tell just as it happened. I don't know as it will do me any harm. Your folks may believe it,

but no one else is likely to do so. I don't mean to go back to Weymouth again, and if I did that letter would not be evidence that anyone would send me to trial on. Anyhow, I will risk that."

"Thank you, with all my heart," Julian said gratefully. "I shall not so much mind, if Frank and Aunt get my story. I know that they will believe it if no one else does, and they can move away from Weymouth to some place where it will not follow them. It won't be so hard for me to bear then, especially if some day the truth gets to be known. Only please direct your letters to 'Colonel Chambers, or the Chairman of the Weymouth magistrates,' because he is at least ten years older than you are, and might die long before you, and the letter might never be opened if directed only to him."

"Right you are, lad. I will see to that."

Just at this moment one of the sailors came down from the look-out above, and said that the signal had just been made from the offing, and that the lugger's boat would be below in a quarter of an hour. All prepared for departure; the lower door was unbolted, the lights extinguished, and they went down to the lower entrance. It was reached by a staircase cut in the chalk, and coming down into a long and narrow passage, at the further end of which was the opening Julian had seen from the sea. The party gathered at the entrance. In a few minutes a boat with muffled oars approached silently; a rope was lowered, a noose at its upper end being placed over a short iron bar projecting three or four inches from the chalk a foot or two inside the entrance.

The French captain went down first. Julian was told to follow. The sailors and Markham then descended. A sharp jerk shook the rope off the bar, and the boat then rowed out to the smuggler, which was lying half a mile from shore. As soon as they were on board the sails were sheeted home, and the craft began to steal quietly through the water, towing the boat behind it. The whole operation had been conducted in perfect silence. The men were accustomed to their work; there was no occasion for orders, and it was not until they were another mile out that a word was spoken.

"All has gone off well," the captain then said. "We got the laces and silks safely away, and the money has been paid for them. The revenue cutter started early this morning, and was off Lyme Regis this afternoon, so we shall have a clear run out. We will keep on the course we are laying till we are well beyond the race, and then make for the west. We have sent word for them to be on the look-out for us at the old place near Dartmouth to-morrow night, and if we are not there then, the night after; if there is danger, they are to send up a rocket from the hill inland."

The wind was but light, and keeping a smart look-out for British cruisers, and lowering their sails down once or twice when a suspicious sail was seen in the distance, they approached the rocky shore some two miles east of the entrance to the bay at ten o'clock on the second evening after starting. A lantern was raised twice above the bulwark, kept there for an instant, and then lowered.

"I expect it is all right," the captain said, "or they would have sent up a rocket before this. Half-past eight is the time arranged, and I think we are about off the landing place. Ah, yes, there is the signal!" he broke off as a light was shown for a moment close down to the water's edge. "Yes, there it is again! Lower the anchor gently; don't let it splash."

A light anchor attached to a hawser was silently let down into the water.

"Now, off with the hatches; get up the kegs."

While some of the men were engaged at this work, others lowered the second boat, and this, and the one towing behind, were brought round to the side. Julian saw that all the men were armed with cutlasses, and had pistols in their belts. Rapidly the kegs were brought up on deck and lowered into the boat.

"Ah, here comes Thompson," the captain said, as a very small boat rowed up silently out of the darkness. "Well, my friend, is all safe?" he asked in broken English as the boat came alongside.

"Safe enough, captain. Most of the revenue men have gone round from here to the other side of the bay, where they got news, as they thought, that a cargo was going to be run. The man on duty here has been squared, and will be away at the other end of his beat. The carts are ready, a quarter

of a mile away. I made you out with my glass just before sunset, and sent round word at once to our friends to be in readiness."

The boats started as soon as their cargoes were on board, and the work went on uninterruptedly for the next two hours, by which time the last keg was on shore, and the boats returned to the lugger. The men were in high spirits. The cargo had been a valuable one, and the whole had been got rid of without interruption. The boats were at once hoisted up, the anchor weighed, and the lugger made her way out to sea.

"What port do you land at?" Julian asked Markham.

"We shall go up the Loire to Nantes," he replied; "she hails from there. To-morrow morning you had best put on that sailor suit I gave you to-day. Unless the wind freshens a good deal we sha'n't be there for three or four days, but I fancy, from the look of the sky, that it will blow up before morning, and, as likely as not, we shall get more than we want by evening. There is generally a cruiser or two off the mouth of the river. In a light wind we can show them our heels easily enough, but if it is blowing at all their weight tells. I am glad to be at sea again, lad, after being cooped up in that cursed prison for two years. It seems to make a new man of one. I don't know but that I am sorry I shot that fellow. I don't say that he didn't deserve it, for he did; but I don't see it quite so strongly as I did when I was living on bread and water, and with nothing to do but to think of how I could get even with him when I got out; besides, I never calculated upon getting anyone else into a mess, and I am downright sorry that I got you into one, Mr. Wyatt. However, the job is done, and it is no use crying over spilt milk."

Markham's prediction turned out correct. A fresh wind was blowing by the morning, and two days later the lugger was running along, close under the coast, fifteen miles south of the mouth of the Loire, having kept that course in order to avoid any British cruisers that might be off the mouth of the river. Before morning they had passed St. Nazaire, and were running up the Loire.

CHAPTER V
FOLLOWING A TRAIL

Frank had started early for a walk with one of his school friends. Returning through the town at three in the afternoon, he saw people talking in groups. They presently met one of their chums.

"What is going on, Vincent?"

"Why, have you not heard? Faulkner, the magistrate, has been shot."

"Shot!" the two boys exclaimed. "Do you mean on purpose or accidentally?"

"On purpose. The servants heard a gun fired close by, and a minute later his horse galloped up to the door. Two men ran along the drive, and, not a hundred yards from the house, found him lying shot through the body. Three of the doctors went off at once. Thompson came back ten minutes ago, for some instruments, I believe. He stopped his gig for a moment to speak to the Rector, and I hear he told him that it might be as well for him to go up at once, as there was very little probability of Faulkner's living through the night."

"Well, I can't say that I am surprised," Frank said. "He has made himself so disliked, there are so many men who have a grudge against him, and he has been threatened so often, that I have heard fellows say dozens of times he would be shot some day. And yet I suppose no one ever really thought that it would come true; anyhow it is a very bad affair."

Leaving the other two talking together, Frank went on home. Mrs. Troutbeck was greatly shocked at the news.

"Dear, dear!" she said, "what dreadful doings one does hear of. Who would have thought that a gentleman, and a magistrate too, could have been shot in broad daylight within a mile or two of us. I did not know him myself, but I have always heard that he was very much disliked, and it is awful to think that he has been taken away like this."

"Well, Aunt, I don't pretend to be either surprised or shocked. If a man spends his life in going out of his way to hunt others down, he must not be surprised if at last one of them turns on him. On the bench he was hated; it was not only because he was severe, but because of his bullying way. See how he behaved in that affair with Julian. I can't say I feel any pity for him at all, he has sent many a man to the gallows, and now his time has come."

At five o'clock it was already dusk, the shutters had been closed, and the lamp lighted. Presently the servant entered.

"There is someone wants to speak to you, Master Frank."

Frank went out into the hall. The head of the constabulary and two of his men were standing there. Much surprised, Frank asked the officer into the other sitting-room.

"What is it, Mr. Henderson?" he said.

"It is a very sad business, a very sad business, Mr. Wyatt. Your brother is not at home, I hear?"

"No. Julian went over this morning to have a day's rabbit-shooting with Dick Merryweather. I expect it won't be long before he is back. There is nothing the matter with him?" he asked, with a vague feeling of alarm at the gravity of the officer's face.

"It is a very painful matter, Mr. Wyatt; but it is useless trying to hide the truth from you, for you must know it shortly. I hold a warrant for your brother's arrest on the charge of attempted wilful murder."

Frank's eyes dilated with surprise and horror.

"You don't mean – " he gasped, and then his faith in his brother came to his aid, and he broke off indignantly: "it is monstrous, perfectly monstrous, Mr. Henderson. I suppose it is Faulkner, and it is because of that wretched smuggling business that suspicions fall on him, as if there were not a hundred others who owe the man a much deeper grudge than my brother did; indeed he had no

animosity against him at all, for Julian got the best of it altogether, and Faulkner has been hissed and hooted every time he has been in the town since. If there was any ill-feeling left over that matter, it would be on his part and not on Julian's. Who signed the warrant? Faulkner himself?"

"No; it is signed by the Colonel and Mr. Harrington. They took the dying deposition of Mr. Faulkner. There is no harm in my telling you that, because it must be generally known when your brother is brought up, but till then please do not let it go further. He has sworn that he overtook Mr. Wyatt two or three hundred yards before he got to his own gate. There was an altercation between them, and he swears that your brother used threats. He had a double-barrelled gun in his hand, and as Faulkner was riding up the drive to the house he was fired at from the trees on his left, and fell from his horse. Almost directly afterwards Mr. Wyatt ran out from the spot where the gun had been fired. Thinking he would finish him if he thought he was still alive, Mr. Faulkner closed his eyes and held his breath. Your brother came up and stood over him, and having satisfied himself that he was dead, ran off through the trees again."

"I believe it is a lie from beginning to end," Frank said passionately. "Julian has brought him into disgrace here, and the fellow invented this charge out of revenge. If it had been in the road, and Faulkner had struck Julian as he did before, and Julian had had his loaded gun in his hand, I don't say but that in his passion he might have shot him; still, I don't believe he would, even then. Julian is one of the best-tempered fellows in the world; still, I would admit that, in the heat of the moment, he might raise his gun and fire, but to say that he loaded his gun after Faulkner had gone on – for I am sure it was empty as he came along, as I have never known him to bring home his gun loaded – and that he then went and hid behind a tree and shot a man down. Why, I would not believe it if fifty honest men swore to it, much less on the oath of a fellow like Faulkner."

"I can't say anything about that, Mr. Wyatt; I have only my duty to do."

"Yes, I understand that, Mr. Henderson. Of course he must be arrested, but I am sure no one will believe the accusation for a minute. Oh!" he exclaimed, as a fresh idea struck him, "what was Faulkner shot with?"

"It is a bullet wound."

"Well, that is quite enough," Frank exclaimed triumphantly. "Julian had his double-barrelled gun with him, and had been rabbit-shooting; and if it had been he who fired it would have been with a charge of shot. You don't suppose he went about with a bullet in his pocket to use in case he happened to meet Faulkner, and have another row with him. Julian never fired a bullet in his life, as far as I know. There is not such a thing as a bullet-mould in the house."

The officer's look of gravity relaxed. "That is important, certainly," he said, "very important. I own that after hearing the deposition read it did seem to me that, as the result of this unfortunate quarrel, your brother might have been so goaded by something Mr. Faulkner said or did, that he had hastily loaded his gun, and in his passion run across the wood and shot him down. But now it is clear, from what you say, that it is most improbable he would have a bullet about him, and unless it can be proved that he obtained one from a gunmaker or otherwise, it is a very strong point in his favour. I suppose your brother has not returned this afternoon?"

"No. I asked the servant, when I got home at three, whether he had returned, though I did not expect him back so soon, and she said that he had not come in, and I am sure he has not done so since."

"Then I will not intrude any longer. I shall place one of my men in front of the house and one behind, and if he comes home his arrest will be managed quietly, and we will not bring him in here at all. It will save a painful scene."

When the officer had left, Frank returned to his aunt.

"What is it, Frank?" she asked.

"Well, Aunt, it is a more absurd affair than the other; but, absurd as it is, it is very painful. There is a warrant out for the arrest of Julian on the charge of attempting to murder Mr. Faulkner."

Mrs. Troutbeck gave a cry, and then burst into a fit of hysterical laughter. After vainly trying to pacify her, Frank went out for the servant, but as her wild screams of laughter continued he put on his hat and ran for the family doctor, who lived but a few doors away. He briefly related the circumstances of the case to him, and then brought him back to the house. It was a long time before the violence of the paroxysm passed, leaving Mrs. Troutbeck so weak that she had to be carried by Frank and the doctor up to her room.

"Don't you worry yourself, Aunt," Frank said, as they laid her down upon the bed; "it will all come out right, just as the last did. It will all be cleared up, no doubt, in a very short time."

As soon as the maid had undressed Mrs. Troutbeck, and had got her into bed, the doctor went up and gave her an opiate, and then went down into the parlour to Frank, who told him the story in full, warning him that he must say nothing about the deposition of Mr. Faulkner until it had been read in court.

"It is a very grave affair, Frank," the old doctor said. "Having known your brother from his childhood, I am as convinced as you are that, however much of this deposition be true or false, Julian never fired the shot; and what you say about the bullet makes it still more conclusive, if that were needed – which it certainly is not with me. Your brother had an exceedingly sweet and even temper. Your father has often spoken to me of it, almost with regret, saying that it would be much better if he had a little more will of his own and a little spice more of temper. Still, it is most unfortunate that he hasn't returned. Of course, he may have met some friend in the town and gone home with him, or he may have stayed at Mr. Merryweather's."

"I don't think he can have stopped in the town anyhow," Frank said; "for the first thing he would have heard when he got back would have been of the shooting of Faulkner, and he would have been sure to have come home to talk it over with me. Of course, he may have stopped with the Merryweathers, but I am afraid he has not. I fancy that part of Faulkner's story must be true; he could never have accused Julian if he had not met him near his gate – for Julian in that case could have easily proved where he was at the time. No, I think they did meet, and very likely had a row. You know what Faulkner is; and I can understand that if he met Julian he would most likely say something to him, and there might then be a quarrel; but I think that his story about Julian coming out and looking at him is either pure fancy or a lie. No doubt he was thinking of him as he rode along; and, badly wounded as he was, perhaps altogether insensible, he may have imagined the rest."

"That is all quite possible," the doctor agreed; "but in that case Julian's not coming home is all the more extraordinary. If he met Faulkner between two and three o'clock, what can he have been doing since?"

This was a question Frank could not answer.

"I can't tell, sir," he said after a long pause; "I really can't imagine. Still, nothing in the world would make me believe that Julian did what he is charged with."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.