

CHAPTER FOUR

I never saw my father again until I was in the prisoner's anteroom at the Old Bailey. It was full of lounging men, whose fleshy limbs bulged out against the tight, loud checks of their coats and trousers. These were jailers waiting to bring in their prisoners. On the other side of one black door the Grand Jury was deliberating on my case, behind another the court was in waiting to try me. I was in a sort of tired lull. All night I had been pacing up and down, trying to bring my brain to think of points--points in my defence. It was very difficult. I knew that I must keep cool, be calm, be lucid, be convincing; and my brain had reeled at times, even in the darkness of the cell. I knew it had reeled, because I remembered that once I had fallen against the stone of one of the walls, and once against the door. Here, in the light, with only a door between myself and the last scene, I regained my hold. I was going to fight every inch from start to finish. I was going to let no chink of their armour go untried. I was going to make a good fight. My teeth chattered like castanets, jarring in my jaws until it was painful. But that was only with the cold.

A hubbub of expostulation was going on at the third door. My turnkey called suddenly:

"Let the genman in, Charlie. Pal o' ourn," and my father ran huntedly into the room. He began an endless tale of a hackney coachman who had stood in front of the door of his coach to prevent his number being taken; of a crowd of cadde-smashers, who had hustled him and filched his purse. "Of course, I made a fight for it," he said, "a damn good fight, considering. It's in the blood. But the watch came, and, in short--on such an occasion as this there is no time for words--I passed the night in the watch-house. Many and many a night I passed there when I and Lord-----But I am losing time."

"You ain't fit to walk the streets of London alone, sir," the turnkey said.

My father gave him a corner of his narrow-lidded eyes. "My man," he said, "I walked the streets with the highest in the land before your mother bore you in Bridewell, or whatever jail it was."

"Oh, no offence," the turnkey muttered.

I said, "Did you find Cowper, sir? Will he give evidence?"

"Jackie," he said agitatedly, as if he were afraid of offending me, "he said you had

filched his wife's rings."

That, in fact, was what Major Cowper had said--that I had dropped into their ship near Port Royal Heads, and had afterwards gone away with the pirates who had filched his wife's rings. My father, in his indignation, had not even deigned to ask him for the address of Jamaica planters in London; and on his way back to find a solicitor he had come into contact with those street rowdies and the watch. He had only just come from before the magistrates.

A man with one eye poked his head suddenly from behind the Grand Jury door. He jerked his head in my direction.

"True bill against that 'ere," he said, then drew his head in again.

"Jackie, boy," my father said, putting a thin hand on my wrist, and gazing imploringly into my eyes, "I'm... I'm ... I can't tell you how...."

I said, "It doesn't matter, father." I felt a foretaste of how my past would rise up to crush me. Cowper had let that wife of his coerce him into swearing my life away. I remembered vividly his blubbering protestations of friendship when I persuaded Tomas Castro to return him his black deed-box with the brass handle, on that deck littered with rubbish.... "Oh, God bless you, God bless you. You have saved me from starvation...." There had been tears in his old blue eyes. "If you need it I will go anywhere... do anything to help you. On the honour of a gentleman and a soldier." I had, of course, recommended his wife to give up her rings when the pirates were threatening her in the cabin. The other door opened, another man said:

"Now, then, in with that carrion. D'you want to keep the judges waiting?"

I stepped through the door straight down into the dock; there was a row of spikes in the front of it. I wasn't afraid; three men in enormous wigs and ermine robes faced me; four in short wigs had their heads together like parrots on a branch. A fat man, bareheaded, with a gilt chain round his neck, slipped from behind into a seat beside the highest placed judge. He was wiping his mouth and munching with his jaws. On each side of the judges, beyond the short-wigged assessors, were chairs full of ladies and gentlemen. They all had their eyes upon me. I saw it all very plainly. I was going to see everything, to keep my eyes open, not to let any chance escape. I wondered why a young girl with blue eyes and pink cheeks tittered and shrugged her shoulders. I did not know what was amusing. What astonished me was the smallness, the dirt, the want of dignity of the room itself. I thought they must be trying a case of my importance there by mistake.

Presently I noticed a great gilt anchor above the judges' heads. I wondered why it was there, until I remembered it was an Admiralty Court. I thought suddenly, "Ah! if I had thought to tell my father to go and see if the Lion had come in in the night!"

A man was bawling out a number of names.... "Peter Plimley, gent., any challenge.... Lazarus Cohen, merchant, any challenge...."

The turnkey beside me leant with his back against the spikes. He was talking to the man who had called us in.

"Lazarus Cohen, West Indian merchant.... Lord, well, I'd challenge...."

The other man said, "S--sh."

"His old dad give me five shiners to put him up to a thing if I could," the turnkey said again.

I didn't catch his meaning until an old man with a very ragged gown was handing up a book to a row of others in a box so near that I could almost have touched them. Then I realized that the turnkey had been winking to me to challenge the jury. I called out at the highest of the judges:

"I protest against that jury. It is packed. Half of them, at least, are West Indian merchants."

There was a stir all over the court. I realized then that what had seemed only a mass of stuffs of some sort were human beings all looking at me. The judge I had called to opened a pair of dim eyes upon me, clasped and unclasped his hands, very dry, ancient, wrinkled. The judge on his right called angrily:

"Nonsense, it is too late.... They are being sworn. You should have spoken when the names were read." Underneath his wig was an immensely broad face with glaring yellow eyes.

I said, "It is scandalous. You want to murder me, How should I know what you do in your courts? I say the jury is packed."

The very old judge closed his eyes, opened them again, then gasped out:

"Silence. We are here to try you. This is a court of law."

The turnkey pulled my sleeve under cover of the planking. "Treat him civil," he

whispered, "Lord Justice Stowell of the Hadmir'lty. 'Tother's Baron Garrow of the Common Law; a beast; him as hanged that kid. You can sass him; it doesn't matter."

Lord Stowell waved his hand to the clerk with the ragged gown; the book passed from hand to hand along the faces of the jury, the clerk gabbling all the while. The old judge said suddenly, in an astonishingly deep, majestic voice:

"Prisoner at the bar, you must understand that we are here to give you an impartial trial according to the laws of this land. If you desire advice as to the procedure of this court you can have it."

I said, "I still protest against that Jury. I am an innocent man, and-----"

He answered querulously, "Yes, yes, afterwards." And then creaked, "Now the indictment...."

Someone hidden from me by three barristers began to read in a loud voice not very easy to follow. I caught:

"For that the said John Kemp, alias Nichols, alias Nikola el Escoces, alias el Demonio, alias el Diablotto, on the twelfth of May last, did feloniously and upon the high seas piratically seize a certain ship called the Victoria... um... um, the properties of Hyman Cohen and others... and did steal and take therefrom six hundred and thirty barrels of coffee of the value of... um... um... um... one hundred and one barrels of coffee of the value of... ninety-four half kegs... and divers others..."

I gave an immense sigh.... That was it, then. I had heard of the Victoria; it was when I was at Horton that the news of her loss reached us. Old Macdonald had sworn; it was the day a negro called Apollo had taken to the bush. I ought to be able to prove that. Afterwards, one of the judges asked me if I pleaded guilty or not guilty. I began a long wrangle about being John Kemp but not Nikola el Escoces. I was going to fight every inch of the way. They said:

"You will have your say afterwards. At present, guilty or not guilty?"

I refused to plead at all; I was not the man. The third judge woke up, and said hurriedly:

"That is a plea of not guilty, enter it as such." Then he went to sleep again. The young girl on the bench beside him laughed joyously, and Mr. Baron Garrow nodded round at her, then snapped viciously at me:

"You don't make your case any better by this sort of foolery." His eyes glared at me like an awakened owl's.

I said, "I'm fighting for my neck... and you'll have to fight, too, to get it."

The old judge said angrily, "Silence, or you will have to be removed."

I said, "I am fighting for my life."

There was a sort of buzz all round the court.

Lord Stowell said, "Yes, yes;" and then, "Now, Mr. King's Advocate, I suppose Mr. Alfonso Jervis opens for you."

A dusty wig swam up from just below my left hand, almost to a level with the dock.

The old judge shut his eyes, with an air of a man who is going a long journey in a post-chaise. Mr. Baron Garrow dipped his pen into an invisible ink-pot, and scratched it on his desk. A long story began to drone from under the wig, an interminable farrago of dull nonsense, in a hypochondriacal voice; a long tale about piracy in general; piracy in the times of the Greeks, piracy in the times of William the Conqueror... pirata nequissima Eustachio, and thanking God that a case of the sort had not been heard in that court for an immense lapse of years. Below me was an array of wigs, on each side a compressed mass of humanity, squeezed so tight that all the eyeballs seemed to be starting out of the heads towards me. From the wig below, a translation of the florid phrases of the Spanish papers was coming:

"His very Catholic Majesty, out of his great love for his ancient friend and ally, his Britannic Majesty, did surrender the body of the notorious El Demonio, called also..."

I began to wonder who had composed that precious document, whether it was the Juez de la Primera Instancia, bending his yellow face and sloe-black eyes above the paper, over there in Havana--or whether it was O'Brien, who was dead since the writing.

All the while the barrister was droning on. I did not listen because I had heard all that before--in the room of the Judge of the First Instance at Havana. Suddenly appearing behind the backs of the row of gentlefolk on the bench was the pale, thin face of my father. I wondered which of his great friends had got him his seat.

He was nodding to me and smiling faintly. I nodded, too, and smiled back. I was going to show them that I was not cowed. The voice of the barrister said:

"M'luds and gentlemen of the jury, that finishes the Spanish evidence, which was taken on commission on the island of Cuba. We shall produce the officer of H. M. S. Elephant, to whom he was surrendered by the Spanish authorities at Havana, thus proving the prisoner to be the pirate Nikola, and no other. We come, now, to the specific instance, m'luds and gentlemen, an instance as vile..."

It was some little time before I had grasped how absolutely the Spanish evidence damned me. It was as if, once I fell into the hands of the English officer on Havana quays, the identity of Nikola could by no manner of means be shaken from round my neck. The barrister came to the facts.

A Kingston ship had been boarded... and there was the old story over again. I seemed to see the Rio Medio schooner rushing towards where I and old Cowper and old Lumsden looked back from the poop to see her come alongside; the strings of brown pirates pour in empty-handed, and out laden. Only in the case of the Victoria there were added the ferocities of "the prisoner at the bar, m'luds and gentlemen of the jury, a fiend in human shape, as we shall prove with the aid of the most respectable witnesses...."

The man in the wig sat down, and, before I understood what was happening, a fat, rosy man--the Attorney-General--whose cheerful gills gave him a grotesque resemblance to a sucking pig, was calling "Edward Sadler," and the name blared like sudden fire leaping up all over the court. The Attorney-General wagged his gown into a kind of bunch behind his hips, and a man, young, fair, with a reddish beard and a shiny suit of clothes, sprang into a little box facing the jury. He bowed nervously in several directions, and laughed gently; then he looked at me and scowled. The Attorney-General cleared his throat pleasantly...

"Mr. Edward Sadler, you were, on May 25th, chief mate of the good ship Victoria...."

The fair man with the beard told his story, the old story of the ship with its cargo of coffee and dye-wood; its good passage past the Gran Caymanos; the becalming off the Cuban shore in latitude so and so, and the boarding of a black schooner, calling itself a Mexican privateer. I could see all that.

"The prisoner at the bar came alongside in a boat, with seventeen Spaniards," he said, in a clear, expressionless voice, looking me full in the face.

I called out to the old judge, "My Lord... I protest. This is perjury. I was not the

man. It Was Nichols, a Nova Scotian."

Mr. Baron Garrow roared, "Silence," his face suffused with blood.

Old Lord Stowell quavered, "You must respect the procedure...."

"Am I to hear my life sworn away without a word?" I asked.

He drew himself frostily into his robes. "God forbid," he said; "but at the proper time you can cross-examine, if you think fit."

The Attorney-General smiled at the jury-box and addressed himself to Sadler, with an air of patience very much tried:

"You swear the prisoner is the man?"

The fair man turned his sharp eyes upon me. I called, "For God's sake, don't perjure yourself. You are a decent man."

"No, I won't swear," he said slowly. "I think he was. He had his face blacked then, of course. When I had sight of him at the Thames Court I thought he was; and seeing the Spanish evidence, I don't see where's the room...."

"The Spanish evidence is part of the plot," I said.

The Attorney-General snickered. "Go on, Mr. Sadler," he said. "Let's have the rest of the plot unfolded."

A juryman laughed suddenly, and resumed an abashed sudden silence. Sadler went on to tell the old story.... I saw it all as he spoke; only gaunt, shiny-faced, yellow Nichols was chewing and hitching his trousers in place of my Tomas, with his sanguine oaths and jerked gestures. And there was Nichol's wanton, aimless ferocity.

"He had two pistols, which he fired twice each, while we were hoisting the studding-sails by his order, to keep up with the schooner. He fired twice into the crew. One of the men hit died afterwards...."

Later, another vessel, an American, had appeared in the offing, and the pirates had gone in chase of her. He finished, and Lord Stowell moved one of his ancient hands. It was as if a gray lizard had moved on his desk, a little toward me.

"Now, prisoner," he said.

I drew a deep breath. I thought for a minute that, after all, there was a little fair play in the game--that I had a decent, fair, blue-eyed man in front of me. He looked hard at me; I hard at him; it was as if we were going to wrestle for a belt. The young girl on the bench had her lips parted and leant forward, her head a little on one side.

I said, "You won't swear I was the man... Nikola el Escoces?"

He looked meditatively into my eyes; it was a duel between us.

"I won't swear," he said. "You had your face blacked, and didn't wear a beard."

A soft growth of hair had come out over my cheeks whilst I lay in prison. I rubbed my hand against it, and thought that he had drawn first blood.

"You must not say 'you,'" I said. "I swear I was not the man. Did he talk like me?"

"Can't say that he did," Sadler answered, moving from one foot to the other.

"Had he got eyes like me, or a nose, or a mouth?"

"Can't say," he answered again. "His face was blacked."

"Didn't he talk Blue Nose--in the Nova Scotian way?"

"Well, he did," Sadler assented slowly. "But any one could for a disguise. It's as easy as..."

Beside me, the turnkey whispered suddenly, "Pull him up; stop his mouth."

I said, "Wasn't he an older man? Didn't he look between forty and fifty?"

"What do you look like?" the chief mate asked.

"I'm twenty-four," I answered; "I can prove it."

"Well, you look forty and older," he answered negligently. "So did he."

His cool, disinterested manner overwhelmed me like the blow of an immense wave; it proved so absolutely that I had parted with all semblance of youth. It was something added to the immense waste of waters between myself and Seraphina; an immense waste of years. I did not ask much of the next witness; Sadler had

made me afraid. Septimus Hearn, the master of the Victoria, was a man with eyes as blue and as cold as bits of round blue pebble; a little goat's beard, iron-gray; apple-coloured cheeks, and small gold earrings in his ears. He had an extraordinarily mournful voice, and a retrospective melancholy of manner. He was just such another master of a trader as Captain Lumsden had been, and it was the same story over again, with little different touches, the hard blue eyes gazing far over the top of my head; the gnarled hands moving restlessly on the rim of his hat.

"Afterwards the prisoner ordered the steward to give us a drink of brandy. A glass was offered me, but I refused to drink it, and he said, 'Who is it that refuses to drink a glass of brandy?' He asked me what countryman I was, and if I was an American."

There were two others from the unfortunate Victoria--a Thomas Davis, boatswain, who had had one of Nikola's pistol-balls in his hip; and a sort of steward--I have forgotten his name--who had a scar of a cutlass wound on his forehead.

It was horrible enough; but what distressed me more was that I could not see what sort of impression I was making. Once the judge who was generally asleep woke up and began to scratch furiously with his quill; once three of the assessors--the men in short wigs--began an animated conversation; one man with a thin, dark face laughed noiselessly, showing teeth like a white waterfall. A man in the body of the court on my left had an enormous swelling, blood-red, and looking as if a touch must burst it, under his chin; at one time he winked his eyes furiously for a long time on end. It seemed to me that something in the evidence must be affecting all these people. The turnkey beside me said to his mate, "Twig old Justice Best making notes in his stud-calendar," and suddenly the conviction forced itself upon me that the whole thing, the long weary trial, the evidence, the parade of fairness, was being gone through in a spirit of mockery, as a mere formality; that the judges and the assessors, and the man with the goitre took no interest whatever in my case. It was a foregone conclusion.

A tiny, fair man, with pale hair oiled and rather long for those days, and with green and red signet rings on fingers that he was forever running through that hair, came mincingly into the witness-box. He held for a long time what seemed to be an amiable conversation with Sir Robert Gifford, a tall, portentous-looking man, who had black beetling brows, like tufts of black horsehair sticking in the crannies of a cliff. The conversation went like this:

"You are the Hon. Thomas Oldham?"

"Yes, yes."

"You know Kingston, Jamaica, very well?"

"I was there four years--two as the secretary to the cabinet of his Grace the Duke of Manchester, two as civil secretary to the admiral on the station."

"You saw the prisoner?"

"Yes, three times."

I drew an immense breath; I thought for a moment that they had delivered themselves into my hands. The thing must prove of itself that I had been in Jamaica, not in Rio Medio, through those two years. My heart began to thump like a great solemn drum, like Paul's bell when the king died--solemn, insistent, dominating everything. The little man was giving an account of the "bawminable" state of confusion into which the island's trade was thrown by the misdeeds of a pirate called Nikola el Demonio.

"I assure you, my luds," he squeaked, turning suddenly to the judges, "the island was wrought up into a pitch of... ah... almost disloyalty. The... ah... planters were clamouring for... ah... separation. And, to be sure, I trust you'll hang the prisoner, for if you don't..."

Lord Stowell shivered, and said suddenly with haste, "Mr. Oldham, address yourself to Sir Robert."

I was almost happy; the cloven hoof had peeped so damningly out. The little man bowed briskly to the old judge, asked for a chair, sat himself down, and arranged his coat-tails.

"As I was saying," he prattled on, "the trouble and the worry that this man caused to His Grace, myself, and Admiral Rowley were inconceivable. You have no idea, you... ah... can't conceive. And no wonder, for, as it turned out, the island was simply honeycombed by his spies and agents. You have no idea; people who seemed most respectable, people we ourselves had dealings with..."

He rattled on at immense length, the barrister taking huge pinches of yellow snuff, and smiling genially with the air of a horse-trainer watching a pony go faultlessly through difficult tricks. Every now and then he flicked his whip.

"Mr. Oldham, you saw the prisoner three times. If it does not overtax your memory pray tell us." And the little creature pranced off in a new direction.

"Tax my memory! Gad, I like that. You remember a man who has had your blood as near as could be, don't you?"

I had been looking at him eagerly, but my interest faded away now. It was going to be the old confusing of my identity with Nikola's. And yet I seemed to know the little beggar's falsetto; it was a voice one does not forget.

"Remember!" he squeaked. "Gad, gentlemen of the jury, he came as near as possible-----You have no idea what a ferocious devil it is."

I was wondering why on earth Nichols should have wanted to kill such a little thing. Because it was obvious that it must have been Nichols.

"As near as possible murdered myself and Admiral Rowley and a Mr. Topnambo, a most enlightened and loyal... ah... inhabitant of the island, on the steps of a public inn."

I had it then. It was the little man David Mac-donald had rolled down the steps with, that night at the Ferry Inn on the Spanish Town road.

"He was lying in wait for us with a gang of assassins. I was stabbed on the upper lip. I lost so much blood... had to be invalided... cannot think of horrible episode without shuddering."

He had seen me then, and when Ramon ("a Spaniard who was afterwards proved to be a spy of El Demonio's--of the prisoner's. He was hung since") had driven me from the place of execution after the hanging of the seven pirates; and he had come into Ramon's store at the moment when Carlos ("a piratical devil if ever there was one," the little man protested) had drawn me into the back room, where Don Balthasar and O'Brien and Seraphina sat waiting. The men who were employed to watch Ramon's had never seen me leave again, and afterwards a secret tunnel was discovered leading down to the quay.

"This, apparently, was the way by which the prisoner used to arrive and quit the island secretly," he finished his evidence in chief, and the beetle-browed, portly barrister sat down. I was not so stupid but what I could see a little, even then, how the most innocent events of my past were going to rise up and crush me; but I was certain I could twist him into admitting the goodness of my tale which hadn't yet been told. He knew I had been in Jamaica, and, put what construction he liked on it, he would have to admit it. I called out:

"Thank God, my turn's come at last!"

The faces of the Attorney-General, the King's Advocate, Sir Robert Gifford, Mr. Lawes, Mr. Jervis, of all the seven counsel that were arrayed to crush me, lengthened into simultaneous grins, varying at the jury-box. But I didn't care; I grinned, too. I was going to show them.

It was as if I flew at the throat of that little man. It seemed to me that I must be able to crush a creature whose malice was as obvious and as nugatory as the green and red rings that he exhibited in his hair every few minutes. He wanted to show the jury that he had rings; that he was a mincing swell; that I hadn't and that I was a bloody pirate. I said:

"You know that during the whole two years Nichols was at Rio I was an improver at Horton Pen with the Macdonalds, the agents of my brother-in-law, Sir Ralph Rooksby. You must know these things. You were one of the Duke of Manchester's spies."

We used to call the Duke's privy council that. "I certainly know nothing of the sort," he said, folding his hands along the edge of the witness-box, as if he had just thought of exhibiting his rings in that manner. He was abominably cool. I said:

"You must have heard of me. The Topnambos knew me."

"The Topnambos used to talk of a blackguard with a name like Kemp who kept himself mighty out of the way in the Vale."

"You knew I was on the island," I pinned him down.

"You used to come to the island," he corrected. "I've just explained how. But you were not there much, or we should have been able to lay hands on you. We wanted to. There was a warrant out after you tried to murder us. But you had been smuggled away by Ramon."

I tried again:

"You have heard of my brother-in-law, Sir Ralph Rooksby?"

I wanted to show that, if I hadn't rings, I had relations.

"Nevah heard of the man in my life," he said.

"He was the largest land proprietor on the island," I said.

"Dessay," he said; "I knew forty of the largest. Mostly sharpers in the boosing-kens." He yawned.

I said viciously:

"It was your place to know the island. You knew Horton Pen--the Macdonalds?"

The face of jolly old Mrs. Mac. came to my mind--the impeccable, Scotch, sober respectability.

"Oh, I knew the Macdonalds," he said--"of them. The uncle was a damn rebellious, canting, planting Scotchman. Horton Pen was the centre of the Separation Movement. We could have hung him if we'd wanted to. The nephew was the writer of an odious blackmailing print. He calumniated all the decent, loyal inhabitants. He was an agent of you pirates, too. We arrested him--got his papers; know all about your relations with him."

I said, "That's all nonsense. Let us hear"--the Attorney-General had always said that--"what you know of myself."

"What I know of you," he sniffed, "if it's a pleasuah, was something like this. You came to the island in a mysterious way, gave out that you were an earl's son, and tried to get into the very excellent society of... ah... people like my friends, the Topnambos. But they would not have you, and after that you kept yourself mighty close; no one ever saw you but once or twice, and then it was riding about at night with that humpbacked scoundrel of a blackmailer.

"You, in fact, weren't on the island at all, except when you came to spy for the pirates. You used to have long confabulations with that scoundrel Ramon, who kept you posted about the shipping. As for the blackmailer, with the humpback, David Macdonald, you kept him, you... ah... subsidized his filthy print to foment mutiny and murder among the black fellows, and preach separation. You wanted to tie our hands, and prevent our... ah... prosecuting the preventive measures against you. When you found that it was no good you tried to murder the admiral and myself, and that very excellent man Topnambo, coming from a ball. After that you were seen encouraging seven of your... ah... pirate fellows whom we were hanging, and you drove off in haste with your agent, Ramon, before we could lay hands on you, and vanished from the island."

I didn't lose my grip; I went at him again, blindly, as if I were boxing with my eyes full of blood, but my teeth set tight. I said:

"You used to buy things yourself of old Ramon; bought them for the admiral to load his frigates with; things he sold at Key West."

"That was one of the lies your scoundrel David Macdonald circulated against us."

"You bought things... even whilst you were having his store watched."

"Upon my soul!" he said.

"You used to buy things...." I pinned him. He looked suddenly at the King's Advocate, then dropped his eyes.

"Nevah bought a thing in my life," he said.

I knew the man had; Ramon had told me of his buying for the admiral more than three hundred barrels of damaged coffee for thirty pounds. I was in a mad temper. I smashed my hand upon the spikes of the rail in front of me, and although I saw hands move impulsively towards me all over the court, I did not know that my arm was impaled and the blood running down.

"Perjurer," I shouted, "Ramon himself told me."

"Ah, you were mighty thick with Ramon..." he said.

I let him stand down. I was done. Someone below said harshly, "That closes our case, m'luds," and the court rustled all over. Old Lord Stowell in front of me shivered a little, looked at the window, and then said:

"Prisoner at the bar, our procedure has it that if you wish to say anything, you may now address the jury. Afterwards, if you had a counsel, he could call and examine your witnesses, if you have any."

It was growing very dark in the court. I began to tell my story; it was so plain, so evident, it shimmered there before me... and yet I knew it was so useless.

I remembered that in my cell I had reasoned out that I must be very constrained; very lucid about the opening. "On such and such a day I landed at Kingston, to become an improver on the estate of my brother-in-law. He is Sir Ralph Rooksby of Horton Priory in Kent." I did keep cool; I was lucid; I spoke like that. I had my eyes fixed on the face of the young girl upon the bench. I remember it so well. Her eyes were fixed, fascinated, upon my hand. I tried to move it, and found that it was stuck upon the spike on which I had jammed it. I moved it carelessly away, and only felt a little pain, as if from a pin-prick; but the blood was dripping on to

the floor, pat, pat. Later on, a man lit the candles on the judge's desk, and the court looked different. There were deep shadows everywhere; and the illuminated face of Lord Stowell looked grimmer, less kind, more ancient, more impossible to bring a ray of sympathy to. Down below, the barristers of the prosecution leaned back with their arms all folded, and the air of men resting in an interval of cutting down a large tree. The barristers who were, merely listeners looked at me from time to time. I heard one say, "That man ought to have his hand bound up." I was telling the story of my life, that was all I could do.

"As for Ramon, how could I know he was in the pay of the pirates, even if he were? I swear I did not know. Everyone on the island had dealings with him, the admiral himself. That is not calumny. On my honour, the admiral did have dealings. Some of you have had dealings with forgers, but that does not make you forgers."

I warmed to it; I found words. I was telling the story for that young girl. Suddenly I saw the white face of my father peep at me between the head of an old man with an enormous nose, and a stout lady in a brown cloak that had a number of little watchmen's capes. He smiled suddenly, and nodded again and again, opened his eyes, shut them; furtively waved a hand. It distracted me, threw me off my balance, my coolness was gone. It was as if something had snapped. After that I remembered very little; I think I may have quoted "The Prisoner of Chillon," because he put it into my head.

I seemed to be back again in Cuba. Down below me the barristers were talking. The King's Advocate pulled out a puce-coloured bandanna, and waved it abroad preparatorily to blowing his nose. A cloud of the perfume of a West Indian bean went up from it, sweet and warm. I had smelt it last at Rio, the sensation was so strong that I could not tell where I was.

The candles made a yellow glow on the judge's desk; but it seemed to be the blaze of light in the cell where Nichols and the Cuban had fenced. I thought I was back in Cuba again. The people in the court disappeared in the deepening shadows. At times I could not speak. Then I would begin again.

If there were to be any possibility of saving my life, I had to tell what I had been through--and to tell it vividly--I had to narrate the story of my life; and my whole life came into my mind. It was Seraphina who was the essence of my life; who spoke with the voice of all Cuba, of all Spain, of all Romance. I began to talk about old Don Balthasar Riego. I began to talk about Manuel-del-Popolo, of his red shirt, his black eyes, his mandolin; I saw again the light of his fires flicker on the other side of the ravine in front of the cave.

And I rammed all that into my story, the story I was telling to that young girl. I knew very well that I was carrying my audience with me; I knew how to do it, I had it in the blood. The old pale, faded, narrow-lidded father who was blinking and nodding at me had been one of the best raconteurs that ever was. I knew how. In the black shadows of the wall of the court I could feel the eyes upon me; I could see the parted lips of the young girl as she leaned further towards me. I knew it because, when one of the barristers below raised his voice, someone hissed "S--sh" from the shadows. And suddenly it came into my head, that even if I did save my life by talking about these things, it would be absolutely useless. I could never go back again; never be the boy again; never hear the true voice of the Ever Faithful Island. What did it matter even if I escaped; even if I could go back? The sea would be there, the sky, the silent dim hills, the listless surge; but I should never be there, I should be altered for good and all. I should never see the breathless dawn in the pondwater of Havana harbour, never be there with Seraphina close beside me in the little drogher. All that remained was to see this fight through, and then have done with fighting. I remember the intense bitterness of that feeling and the oddity of it all; of the one "I" that felt like that, of the other that was raving in front of a lot of open-eyed idiots, three old judges, and a young girl. And, in a queer way, the thoughts of the one "I" floated through into the words of the other, that seemed to be waving its hands in its final struggle, a little way in front of me.

"Look at me... look at what they have made of me, one and the other of them. I was an innocent boy. What am I now? They have taken my life from me, let them finish it how they will, what does it matter to me, what do I care?"

There was a rustle of motion all round the court. On board Rowley's flagship the heavy irons had sawed open my wrists. I hadn't been ironed in Newgate, but the things had healed up very little. I happened to look down at my claws of hands with the grime of blood that the dock spikes had caused.

"What sort of a premium is it that you set on sticking to the right? Is this how you are going to encourage the others like me? What do I care about your death? What's life to me? Let them get their scaffold ready. I have suffered enough to be put out of my misery. God, I have suffered enough with one and another. Look at my hands, I say. Look at my wrists, and say if I care any more." I held my ghastly paws high, and the candle light shone upon them.

Out of the black shadows came shrieks of women and curses. I saw my young girl put her hands over her face and slip slowly, very slowly, from her chair, down out of sight. People were staggering in different directions. I had had more to say, but I forgot in my concern for the young girl. The turnkey pulled my sleeve and said:

"I say, that ain't true, is it, it ain't true?" Because he seemed not to want it to have been true, I glowed for a moment with the immense pride of my achievement. I had made them see things.

A minute after, I understood how futile it was. I was not a fool even in my then half-mad condition. The real feeling of the place came back upon me, the "Court of Law" of it. The King's Advocate was whispering to the Attorney-General, he motioned with his hand, first in my direction, then towards the jury; then they both laughed and nodded. They knew the ropes too well for me, and there were seven West India merchants up there who would remember their pockets in a minute. But I didn't care. I had made them see things.