

The... Noque's March.

By
E. W. HORNING.
Author of "Raffles,"
"The Amateur Cracks-
man," "Stingaree,"
Etc.
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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

CHAPTER I.—Thomas Erichsen, a young
lawyer, has lost the money with which he
was to pay his passage out to India. He
finds that his only chance of getting the
money is to return to his home in London,
and to ask his father for the money. He
starts on his journey, but is stopped by
a man who offers him a large sum of
money to go to a certain place. Erichsen
refuses, and is taken to a room where
he is told that he must go to a certain
place, and that he must not return.
CHAPTER II.—Erichsen goes to the place
mentioned, and finds a man who offers
him a large sum of money to go to a
certain place. Erichsen refuses, and is
taken to a room where he is told that
he must go to a certain place, and that
he must not return.

CHAPTER VIII

Mr. Harding drove home in
a state of fury and was met by
Claire upon the steps. Her
heart was at his feet. He
passed her without a word. She
followed him into his library and
besought him to tell her what had hap-
pened.

"Nothing," she said, "I wash my hands
of a young man, that's all."
"You mean Erichsen?"
"Yes."
"You have changed your mind?"
"I have."
And he told her how the prisoner
had treated the attorney he had sent
him that very afternoon, committing
brutal and unprovoked assault upon
the very man who was there to save
his life, if that had been possible. It
was not the villain would hang, and
rightly too. But there was gratitude!
There was a young tiger in human
shape.

Claire kept her head, and gradually
Mr. Harding cooled down. Then she
asked questions and discovered that
it was not the family lawyer who had
been so grossly handled, but one whose
name was new to her.

"Lattersley never touches criminal
work," said her father; "besides, I
should have been ashamed to ask him.
No; I went to the very man for the
job, and this is all the thanks I get!"
"Did he know it was you?"
"No; I sent word I would give any
money, but not my name."
"That message was delivered?"
"It was."
"Something more must have been
said."
"Hardly a word. My man was pro-
ceeding to business when this man
sprang upon him and flung him out of
the cell."

Claire shook her head.
"I cannot think that's all that passed,"
said she.
"It was, though; you ask the ward-
ers. There were three of them outside
the open door, and they've put him in
a straight waistcoat for it, at any rate!
So you see how he has made use of
the chance I gave him. Don't ask me
to give him another, that's all!"
"No, no," said Claire sadly; "it was
only too noble of you to give him one
at all, and I shall never, never, never
forget all this—your forgiveness—
everything! Papa, dear, you may not
have me with you very long; how can
I go on living after such a thing? I
loved him, and I long to die. But until
I do I promise one thing—I may de-
ceive others, but never again will I de-
ceive or disobey my own dear father!"
She spoke with the sad fortitude of
sheer despair, and she left Nicholas
Harding in an icy exhalation, with one
tingling spot where she had stooped
and kissed his face.

Claire had hardly reached her room
when there was a knock at the door,
and in came Hannah with a neat, sealed
packet.
"Oh, please, miss, Mr. Daintree said
I was to give you this."
"Mr. Daintree?"
She had seen him during the day;
then what could he have to say to her
which would not bear plain verbal ut-
terance? Claire opened the packet
when the maid was gone and found a
smaller packet and a letter inside. The
letter ran:

Dear Miss Harding—Think what you
will of me for slandering the dead. I
can bear it better than to see you mourn-
ing one who was never worthy to touch
the hem of your garment. The inclosed
will give you a true insight into the
character of the late Captain Blaydes, but
I make a separate packet of it so that you
may destroy it unread if you prefer not
to know and to thank me the less.
You may remember telling me that
Captain Blaydes had the room that I
have now when he was here, and that
not. That was the week before last. The
weather has been so warm the fire has
not been lighted since my return, and to-
day quite by chance I discovered upon
it in the grate the fragments which I have
put together and inclosed. I will not
tell you the word that caught my eye
and irresistibly impelled me to put the
letter together and read it to you. I
will seek to defend an action that will
no doubt condemn me in your eyes for
ever. It was dishonorable, admit it.
But I am a believer in instinct. My in-
stinct always told me that that man was
a bad man, and my instinct told me
that I was within reach of proving his
own unerring truth and the measure of
a villain's villainy. I have done both, as
you will soon see if you can nerve your-
self to know the truth. If not, condemn
me with a glance and with words as bitter
as you please, and I leave this house
tonight and forever. I shall never regret
what I have done. You mourn a traitor,
and I had rather forfeit your respect,
nay, and my own honor to boot—than let
one so divine waste another's on one
so despicable!

But if you forgive me, oh, let me hear
it from your own sweet lips, and I will
move heaven and earth to atone for
what present means this may inflict!
One day you will thank me. Meanwhile,
if you do not return my love, and if
your lightest word shall be my law, if
only I could do something for you! My
own remaining honor to boot—than let
one so divine waste another's on one
so despicable!

CHAPTER IX

ABOUT a quarter to 11 next morn-
ing, before the adjourned ex-
amination had been many
minutes in progress, a smart,
slight gentleman was seen to shoulder
his way into the well of the Maryle-
bone police office and touch the pro-
secution's barrister on the arm. The cap-
able face now a trifle flushed, was well
known in that court, and at sight of it
the learned counsel shrugged his shoul-
ders and sat down. Thereupon the in-
terloper bowed briskly to his worship,
who had already recognized him with a
sigh.

"Well, Mr. Bassett?"
"I must apologize to your worship
for being late; but, in point of fact, I
have just this minute been instructed
for the defense."
"Do I understand that you have not
yet seen the prisoner with reference to
the charge I am now hearing against
him?"
"There has been no opportunity, your
worsnip. Up to 10 o'clock this morn-
ing I had received no communication
upon the matter."
"Dear me, dear me! Then I suppose
you want to confer with him here in
court?"
"With your worship's leave!"
The magistrate bowed.

"They've been telling you about yes-
terday," said Tom nervously, through
the rails. "The fellow took it for
granted I was guilty—among other
things. Do you?"
The smart solicitor shook his head
and said they had no time to waste.
"What he wished to hear was the pris-
oner's version of his origin to its end,
and the prisoner would please be brief
and speak in a whisper."
Tom was brevity itself. Indeed, he

had his story almost suspiciously pat,
for he had already made up his mind
as to the one fact which he intended to
suppress. This was the source of his
information as to Blaydes' latest
whereabouts. He owed to no such
information at all. The meeting was a
chance meeting, that was to be his
sole story.

"Go on, go on."
"You don't believe a word I say."
"Nonsense, my good fellow. I be-
lieve every word. Come, come, they're
getting impatient. You gave him a re-
ceipt and then?"
Tom flushed with a leaden heart
and tongue. To his surprise, however,
Mr. Bassett was all smiles when he
had done. Then he put a few ques-
tions, and the latter the answer the
sprightlier the solicitor's nod. The lat-
ter, in fact, foresaw a defense about
as weak as one could be, but a case
even more sensational than he had
supposed. And sensation happened to
be this brisk practitioner's profes-
sional loadstar.

Proceedings were resumed at two
minutes past 11, when the witness
Adwick, recited, identified a pair of
dilapidated shoes and the mutilated
elements of a leaver as having belong-
ed to the accused. Bassett had no idea
what point the prosecution designed to
make, but at once he gave a taste of
his quality. He pressed the witness
and shook her as to the hat, but the
shoes she stood firm; she had
cleared them often enough, so she
ought to know. Then she cleaned the
lodgers' boots herself? Well, not all.
And an adroit question or two reveal-
ed the fact that Erichsen had been dis-
covered in the garden and informed
who had been retained for the defense
in a meaning voice which conveyed no
special message. He had caught fire at
a word and from that moment made it
the business of his life to rescue that
of an obscure homicide. He could talk
of nothing else. His passionate zeal
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"Five hundred guineas!" she repeat-
ed slowly. "You are never going to
find five hundred guineas?"
"And why not?" said he, with ready
plume. "Do you think that that col-
ossal sum is beyond my means?"
"For a man of whom you know noth-
ing—who has no claim upon you? Yes,
I do!"
"London me!" replied Daintree in his
most elaborate manner. "I know at
least as much of the young man as
does Miss Harding. His case has al-
ready excited her sympathy. He has
therefore the very strongest claim up-
on mine."
"Oh, but you must not do it!" cried
Claire impulsively. "It is too much
for you to dream of doing. I am sorry
I ever said a word about it. You are
too noble, too generous, too good!"
He hung his head a moment and
then exclaimed, with the extraordinary
passion of the man, that there was
nothing he would not do to win such
words from her lips; that she had re-
paid him already a hundredfold.

"And I think the satisfaction cheap at the
price." Those had been his actual
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strengthened it still more? And, good
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to defend her. He could not deny, and
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was only necessary to act the lie, and
Claire scorned herself for the slight
comfort that mean distinction gave
her against her will.

It was an obviously genuine letter,
addressed to Blaydes by some poor
woman, but that was all Claire allowed
herself to discover. A feeling of in-
credible weakness made her hot all
over, and she turned the letter upside
down to examine the method of recon-
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a sheet. A few were missing. Many
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"Then, instead of undeciding him,
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Claire blushed hotly. "I cannot help
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Any woman would do the same."
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"Very well, then. It is to give Tom
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CHAPTER X
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him. Could I leave a stone unturned?"
"But what can Daintree do?"
"What you thought of doing your-
self."
"He has never consented?"
"Eagerly. He is going to have a so-
liloquy at Marylebone tomorrow morn-
ing."
Mr. Harding glared at the girl, who
flung back her ringlets and met his
look unflinching and unabashed. Then
she went to her room.

CHAPTER X
CLAIRE HARDING had now ad-
ventured upon a narrow ledge.
On the one hand she was bound
to show a proper appreciation
of Daintree's exertions, which she her-
self had inspired; on the other, to feign
a purely impersonal or benevolent in-
terest in the unhappy youth on whose
behalf those exertions were being
made. So all day long she must be
ready with a smile as false as any
other number's, even though she spent
the night in prayer for Tom and
for her own forgiveness. Yet praying did
not bring her peace of mind. She
could not convince herself that she was
in the right; that even her great and
justified means of downward hypocrisy
and deceit. There were two ways of
looking at her conduct, and Claire,
with a breadth of view which was
rare, saw it both ways from the be-
ginning. She was acting a lie to save
a life. That was one side of the mat-
ter. She was screening the guilty at
the expense of the innocent. That was
the other side. And if Claire was in
any respect singular among women it
was in this inherent and not invariably
convenient faculty of seeing the other
side whether she would or no.

All her love could not blind her to
the terrible strength of the case against
Tom, and all her prayers could not un-
say what Tom had said to her about
the murdered man on the very night of
the murder. "I'd hang for the bound

and think the satisfaction cheap at the
price." Those had been his actual
words. They were forever tolling, toll-
ing in her ears, and, strong though the
strengthened it still more? And, good
reason as all the world had to think
him guilty, had not she, God help her,
better reason than any living man or
woman? But, oh, she could not and
she never would believe it of him—
murder! And even with that eye in
her heart she did believe it, but fought
to deceive herself a little longer. Her
first theory, however, that of self de-
fense, was virtually shattered by his
reported wholesale denials. Then
what more was to be said for the de-
perate hero of a gallant fight to the
death with the dead man's possessions
upon his person?

Claire could not imagine, but a clever
barrister might—nay, would—and she
set her teeth and vowed that Tom
should have the finest brain at the bar
to defend her. He could not deny, and
though she perjured her soul for the
price. But this was not necessary. It
was only necessary to act the lie, and
Claire scorned herself for the slight
comfort that mean distinction gave
her against her will.

It was an obviously genuine letter,
addressed to Blaydes by some poor
woman, but that was all Claire allowed
herself to discover. A feeling of in-
credible weakness made her hot all
over, and she turned the letter upside
down to examine the method of recon-
struction. With admirable ingenuity
Daintree had pasted the scraps upon
a sheet. A few were missing. Many
were black from the soot. Claire sim-
ply stared and gazed at her own fire-
place. It was laid and all ready for lighting.
A moment later it was lit, and the
dead man's letter was blazing in its
midst. Then Claire breathed again and
took another look at Daintree's warn-
ing before lighting it too.

"An interesting revelation of char-
acter," said she when this was done.
"I shall never think the same of him
again, or of myself either. But what
does that matter since I can never
think the same of Tom? Nothing mat-
ters except saving his life. And here
is a man who says he'll do anything
for me. Will he? We shall see."
She had a word with Daintree be-
fore dinner. "Forgive you? I thank
you with all my heart," said she. And
great was the change in her this evening.
It was no time for gossip, but
Claire was unshaken. Her eyes spark-
led. She conversed freely on the
topic of the hour, and when Mr. Har-
ding was moved after all to give Dain-
tree a judicious version of his attempt
to provide fair play for a dastardly
consentment with the result, the girl
took her father's breath away by look-
ing hard at his great and declaring
that she would finance the defense her-
self if she had the money.

"What on earth did you mean by
saying that?" asked Mr. Harding af-
terward. "Have you forgotten your
word of honor that nobody should ever
suspect what had existed between you
and Erichsen?"
"This was when the girl had said
good night. Mr. Harding followed her
speaking to her, for Claire and Dain-
tree had been together in the garden
all the evening."
"No, papa," she replied. "I have for-
gotten nothing that I said to you. Mr.
Daintree, at any rate, suspects nothing
at all."
"You said enough to make him."
"I don't think I did."
"Not when you said you'd pay for a
defense if you had the money? Are
you in love with the murdered man?"
"He thinks I was, but that some-
thing has since caused a complete re-
vision of feeling, as to which I may
as well explain everything." And she
told the incident of the letters without
hiding a thing. "So he thinks it quite
natural that I should fly to the other
extreme and want no human creature
to hang for one so base. You see,"
said Claire shrewdly, "he is a man of
extremes himself."
"Then, instead of undeciding him,
you have literally fooled him to the
top of his bent?"
Claire blushed hotly. "I cannot help
that. I may make up for it some day.
Any woman would do the same."
Mr. Harding was slow to understand.
"That he should never know what I
know," said he, "is right enough. But
why carry the thing so far? Why pre-
tend this revision?"
Claire hung her head.
"Come, dear, be candid. You prom-
ised to hide nothing more from me.
You are hiding your chief motive.
What is it?"
"I would rather not say."
"And I insist on knowing."
"Very well, then. It is to give Tom
Erichsen another chance."
Harding turned livid.
"That young—"
"Oh, don't be angry! You know you
thought of it yourself. And I loved
him. Could I leave a stone unturned?"
"But what can Daintree do?"
"What you thought of doing your-
self."
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