

**A VOICE FROM THE  
SEA; OR, THE WRECK  
OF THE EGLANTINE**

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A Voice from the Sea; Or, the Wreck of the Eglantine by Ruth Elliott

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**RUTH ELLIOTT**

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A  
VOICE FROM THE SEA;  
OR,  
*The Wreck of the "Eglantine."*

BY  
RUTH ELLIOTT,  
AUTHOR OF  
*"John Lyon," "Undeceived," "James Daryll," etc., etc.*

THIRD THOUSAND.



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# A VOICE FROM THE SEA.

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## CHAPTER THE FIRST.

**R**ICHARD HILLIARD, shipowner, sat at dinner in his richly-furnished dining-room. He was alone, for it was one of his fancies always to dismiss the servants when his son was away. He said it irritated him to be perpetually watched, and Richard Hilliard was a nervous man.

By his side was a small square table covered with papers, bills of lading, letters from underwriters and shipping agents, communications from home and foreign ports, all arranged according to their order with methodical precision. Between these and the dinner his attention was divided. It was a curious custom of his, this bringing business to the dinner-table, and one over which he and his son had had many a battle. But Christian Hilliard was dining out, and his father felt his absence a relief, for there were letters beside him which demanded immediate thought and action,

but which he would not have had Christian see for half his fortune.

Two letters, one from Captain Thorpe, of the ship *Eglantine*, the other bearing no signature, but apparently written by, or at the instigation of, a seaman of the same vessel, spelling and composition alike defective. Over these two Richard Hilliard pondered long, with knitted brows.

Captain Thorpe's ran thus:—"There is a rumour among the men—how, or by whom spread, I do not know—that the *Eglantine* is not fit to send to sea. I have done my best to reassure them, but they evidently distrust me. If you would send me Grant's letter to read to them, it would have more effect than anything I could say."

A simple request, apparently, but one which it was impossible to comply with.

Ring the bell, impatiently, Richard Hilliard ordered the dinner to be removed, and with the secrecy habitual to him, thrust the letters into his pocket till he was again alone. Then he spread them on the table before him, bending over them with anxious thought. The second letter seemed to give him the most annoyance, though his lip curled contemptuously as he read: "Sir,—One of your ships, called the *Eglantine*, is just going out to sea with rotten timbers and a heavy cargo; so heavy, that there is only a few inches of side above the water. The men know that the timber is rotten, and they know that the ship isn't safe;



and they won't go to sea unless the cargo is lightened, and the rotten timbers done up. If you don't do it they will leave the ship, or lay complaints before the magistrates."

It was at the threat more than the spelling that the shipowner's lip curled. He knew the men were powerless, and he could afford a little contempt. And yet he did not like the letter. Whoever wrote it might give trouble unless some means were found to stop his tongue, and Richard Hilliard was not one to stick at trifles.

"Leave the ship!" he repeated, with a quiet smile; "easier said than done, my fine fellow; you had better try it. The ship is going to sea, and you are going with her, so you might as well make up your mind to accept the inevitable. However, I'll just find out who you are, and perhaps I shall have a word to say to you."

Laying the letter on one side, he took up Captain Thorpe's. "Confound the fellow!" he exclaimed, with irritation; "he has been listening to their complaints and arguing with them, instead of ordering them to hold their tongues and be off to their work. That is the only way of managing such fellows. Send him Grant's letter, indeed!"

Gathering up the papers, he walked slowly out of the dining-room into his own private room across the passage, and opening his desk, brought from a secret drawer the letter in question. It contained the result of a close examination of the

*Eglantine* made by the man Grant, and as yet no eyes but those of the writer and the shipowner had rested upon it. Toward the end stood this sentence: "In her present state, the *Eglantine* is certainly not fit for sea. Indeed, I doubt if any repairs will make her seaworthy." No wonder Richard Hilliard repeated Captain Thorpe's words sarcastically, "Send me Grant's letter."

"Have more effect on them!" he muttered, "you are nearer the truth than you think, Captain Thorpe. However, I'll soon settle you."

Taking up his pen, he began to write: "I am sorry there is this feeling among the men, sorry and surprised. If the *Eglantine* is not seaworthy, what is the meaning of the late repairs? As you know, I have been at great expense to have her thoroughly seen to, and the repairs have been extensive. She is now in a fit state to go to sea. Grant's letter contained a list of repairs necessary, *all of which* have been attended to. You had better tell the men this. Do not argue with them; merely repeat my words in a decisive tone—manner goes a long way with such men—and order them off to their work. I am not going to have my plans altered, and business interfered with, to please the timid scruples of a womanish crew. Tell them they are a set of cowards, and shame them into silence." Then followed a few directions as to cargo and time of sailing, and the letter was sealed and sent.

It was a cold, dark night, and Christian Hilliard

shivered as he hurried along the almost deserted streets.

"Cold enough for November," he muttered, drawing his collar high over his ears; "I verily believe the seasons are changing. Father Christmas of the olden times would not recognise his degenerate sons of the present day, and as for summer!" A significant shrug finished the sentence. Turning a corner sharply, he almost came in contact with a man in an ordinary seaman's dress.

"I beg pardon, sir—Mr. Christian Hilliard, I think?"

"At your service, my friend," was the ready reply. Christian Hilliard had ever a pleasant word for rich and poor.

"Can I speak with you a minute, sir?"

"Won't to-morrow do?" asked Christian, as a keen wind came cutting up from the sea.

"No, sir; to-morrow won't do as well as to-night," was the decisive answer. "I won't keep you long out in this cold, but I must speak to you."

"Speak on, then," replied Christian, good-humouredly, resigning himself to his fate.

"Sir, you don't know much about shipping, I hear; you've been in foreign parts, and have had nothing to do with your father's business."

"Not much; but, my good fellow, what has that to do with you?"

"It has a great deal to do with me, and with