

**ФРЕДЕРИК
МАРРИЕТ**

PERCIVAL

KEENE

Фредерик Марриет

Percival Keene

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Содержание

Chapter One	5
Chapter Two	9
Chapter Three	11
Chapter Four	15
Chapter Five	17
Chapter Six	20
Chapter Seven	23
Chapter Eight	26
Chapter Nine	28
Chapter Ten	32
Chapter Eleven	35
Chapter Twelve	38
Chapter Thirteen	42
Chapter Fourteen	46
Chapter Fifteen	51
Chapter Sixteen	56
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	60

Frederick Marryat

Percival Keene

Chapter One

A few miles from the town of Southampton there is an old mansion-house, which has been for centuries known as Madeline Hall, in the possession of the de Versely family. It is a handsome building, surrounded by a finely timbered park of some extent, and, what is more important, by about 12,000 acres of land, which also appertain to it. At the period in which I commence this history, there resided in this mansion an elderly spinster of rank, named the Honourable Miss Delmar, sister of the late Lord de Versely and aunt to the present earl, and an Honourable Captain Delmar, who was the second son of the deceased nobleman. This property belonged to the Honourable Miss Delmar, and was at her entire disposal upon her decease.

The Honourable Captain Delmar, at the time I am speaking of, commanded a frigate employed upon what was designated channel service, which in those days implied that the captain held a seat in the House of Commons and that he voted with the ministry; and further, that his vote might, when required, be forthcoming, the frigate was never sea-going, except during the recess. It must be admitted that H.M. ship Paragon did occasionally get under weigh and remain cruising in sight of land for two or three days, until the steward reported that the milk provided for the captain's table was turning sour; upon which important information the helm was immediately put up, and the frigate, in a case of such extreme distress, would drop her anchor at the nearest port under her lee. Now as the Paragon was constantly at Spithead, Captain Delmar was very attentive in visiting his aunt, who lived at Madeline Hall; ill-natured people asserted, because she had so fine an estate in her own gift. Certain it is, that he would remain there for weeks, which gave great satisfaction to the old lady, who liked her nephew, liked attention, and was even so peculiar as to like sailors. But it must be observed that there was another person at the mansion who also liked the captain, liked attention, and liked sailors; this was Miss Arabella Mason, a very pretty young woman of eighteen years of age, who constantly looked in the glass merely to ascertain if she had ever seen a face which she preferred to her own, and who never read any novel without discovering that there was a remarkable likeness between the heroine and her pretty self.

Miss Arabella Mason was the eldest daughter of the steward of the old Lord de Versely, brother to the Honourable Miss Delmar, and was much respected by his lordship for his fidelity and his knowledge of business, in the transaction of which he fell, for he was felling trees, and a tree fell upon him. He left a widow and two daughters: it was said that at his death Mrs Mason was not badly off, as her husband had been very careful of his earnings. Mrs Mason, however, did not corroborate this statement; on the contrary, she invariably pleaded poverty; and the Honourable Miss Delmar, after Lord de Versely's death—which happened soon after that of his steward—sent both the daughters to be educated at a country school, where, as everything that is taught is second-rate, young ladies, of course, receive a second-rate education. Mrs Mason was often invited by the Honourable Miss Delmar to spend a month at Madeline Hall, and used to bring her eldest daughter, who had left school, with her. Latterly, however, the daughter remained as a fixture, and Mrs Mason received but an occasional invitation. It may be inquired in what capacity Miss Arabella Mason remained at the Hall; she was not a servant, for her position in life was above that of a menial; neither was she received altogether in the saloon, as she was of too humble a grade to mix with gentry and nobility; she was, therefore, betwixt and between, a sort of humble companion in the drawing-room, a cut above the housekeeper in the still-room, a fetcher and carrier of the honourable spinster's wishes, a sort of link between the aristocratic old dame and her male attendants, towards whom she had a sort of old maidish aversion.

However this position might be found useful to her mistress, it must be admitted that it was a most unfortunate position for a young, thoughtless, and very pretty girl, moreover, who was naturally very lively, very smart in repartee, and very fond of being admired.

As the Honourable Captain Delmar was very constant in his visits to his aunt, it was but natural that he should pay some little attention to her humble companion. By degrees the intimacy increased, and at last there were reports in the servants' hall, that the captain and Miss Bella Mason had been seen together in the evergreen walk; and as the captain's visits were continually repeated during the space of two years so did the scandal increase, and people became more ill-natured. It was now seen that Miss Bella had been very often found in tears, and the old butler and the older housekeeper shook their heads at each other like responsive mandarins; the only person who was ignorant of the scandal afloat was the old lady spinster herself.

I must now introduce another personage. The Honourable Captain Delmar did not, of course, travel without his valet, and this important personage had been selected out of the marine corps which had been drafted into the frigate. Benjamin Keene, for such was his name, was certainly endowed with several qualities which were indispensable in a valet; he was very clean in his person, very respectful in his deportment, and, after the sovereign of Great Britain, looked upon the Honourable Captain Delmar as the greatest person in the world. Moreover, Benjamin Keene, although only a private marine was, without exception, one of the handsomest men that ever was seen and being equally as well made and well drilled as he was handsome in person, he was the admiration of all the young women. But Nature, who delights in a drawback, had contrived to leave him almost without brains; and further, he was wholly uneducated—for he was too stupid to learn—his faculties were just sufficient to enable him, by constant drilling, to be perfect in the manual exercise, and mechanically to perform his duties as a valet.

Ben always accompanied his master to the hall, where the former was at one and the same time the admiration and laughter of all the servants. It hardly need be observed, that the clever and sprightly Miss Arabella Mason considered Ben as one much beneath her, that is, she said so on his first arrival at Madeline hall; but, strange to say, that two years afterwards, just at the time that reports had been raised that she had been frequently discovered in tears, there was a change in her manner towards him; indeed some people insinuated that she was setting her cap at the handsome marine: this idea, it is true, was ridiculed by the majority; but still the intimacy appeared rapidly to increase. It was afterwards asserted by those who find out everything after it has taken place, that Ben would never have ventured to look up to such an unequal match had he not been prompted to it by his master, who actually proposed that he should marry the girl. That such was the fact is undoubted, although they knew it not; and Ben, who considered the wish of his captain as tantamount to an order, as soon as he could comprehend what his captain required of him, stood up erect and raised his hand with a flourish to his head, in token of his obedience. Shortly afterwards, Captain Delmar again came over to Madeline Hall, accompanied as usual, by Ben, and the second day after their arrival it was made known to all whom it might concern, that Miss Arabella Mason had actually contracted a secret marriage with the handsome Benjamin Keene.

Of course, the last person made acquainted with this interesting intelligence was the Honourable Miss Delmar, and her nephew took upon himself to make the communication. At first the honourable spinster bridled up with indignation, wondered at the girl's indelicacy, and much more at her demeaning herself by marrying a private marine. Captain Delmar replied, that it was true that Ben was only a private, but that every common soldier was a gentleman by profession. It was true that Bella Mason might have done better—but she was his aunt's servant, and Keene was his valet, so that the disparity was not so very great. He then intimated that he had long perceived the growing attachment; talked of the danger of young people being left so much together; hinted about opportunity, and descanted upon morals and propriety. The Honourable Miss Delmar was softened down by the dexterous reasoning of her nephew; she was delighted to find so much virtue extant in a sailor; and,

after an hour's conversation, the married couple were sent for, graciously pardoned, and Mrs Keene, after receiving a very tedious lecture, received a very handsome present. But if her mistress was appeased, Mrs Keene's mother was not. As soon as the intelligence was received, old Mrs Mason set off for Madeline Hall. She first had a closeted interview with her daughter, and then with Captain Delmar, and as soon as the latter was over, she immediately took her departure, without paying her respects to the mistress of the Hall, or exchanging one word with any of the servants; this conduct gave occasion to more innuendoes—some indeed ascribed her conduct to mortification at her daughter's having made so imprudent a match, but others exchanged very significant glances.

Three weeks after the marriage, the Parliament having been prorogued, the admiral of the port considered that he was justified in ordering the frigate out on a cruise. Ben Keene, of course accompanied his master, and it was not until three months had passed away that the frigate returned into port. As usual, the Honourable Captain Delmar, as soon as he had paid his respects to the admiral, set off to visit his aunt, accompanied by his benedict marine. On his arrival, he found that everything appeared to be in great confusion; indeed an event was occurring which had astonished the whole household; the butler made a profound bow to the captain; the footmen forgot their usual smirk when he alighted. Captain Delmar was ushered in solemn silence into the drawing-room, and his aunt, who had notice of his arrival received him with a stiff, prim air of unwonted frigidity, with her arms crossed before her on her white muslin apron.

"My dear aunt," said Captain Delmar, as she coldly took his proffered hand, "what is the matter?"

"The matter is this, nephew," replied the old lady—"that marriage of your marine and Bella Mason should have taken place six months sooner than it did. This is a wicked world, nephew; and sailors, I'm afraid, are—"

"Marines, you should say, in this instance, my dear aunt," replied Captain Delmar, insinuatingly. "I must confess that neither sailors nor marines are quite so strict as they ought to be; however, Ben has married her. Come, my dear aunt, allow me to plead for them, although I am very much distressed that such an event should take place in your house. I think," added he, after a pause, "I shall give Mr Keene seven dozen at the gangway, for his presumption, as soon as I return on board."

"That won't mend the matter, nephew," replied Miss Delmar. "I'll turn her out of the house as soon as she can be moved."

"And I'll flog him as soon as I get him on board," rejoined the captain. "I will not have your feelings shocked, and your mind harassed in this way, by any impropriety on the part of my followers—most infamous—shameful—abominable—unpardonable," interjected the captain, walking the quarter-deck up and down the room.

The Honourable Miss Delmar continued to talk, and the honourable captain to agree with her in all she said, for an hour at least. When people are allowed to give vent to their indignation without the smallest opposition they soon talk it away; such was the case with the Honourable Miss Delmar. When it was first announced that Bella Keene was safely in bed with a fine boy, the offended spinster turned away from the communication with horror; when her own maid ventured to remark that it was a lovely baby, she was ordered to hold her tongue; she would not see the suffering mother, and the horrid marine was commanded to stay in the kitchen, lest she should be contaminated by meeting him on the stairs; but every day softened down her indignation, and before a fortnight was over the Honourable Miss Delmar had not only seen but admired the baby; and at last decided upon paying a visit to the mother, who was now sufficiently recovered to undergo a lecture of about two hours' length, in which the honourable spinster commented upon her *indecenty*, *indiscretion*, *inconsiderateness*, *incorrectness*, *indecorum*, *incontinence*, and *indelicacy*; pointing out that her conduct was most inexcusable, iniquitous, and most infamous. The Honourable Miss Delmar having had such a long innings then gave it up, because she was out of breath. Bella, who waited patiently to make her response, and who was a very clever girl, then declared, with many tears, that

she was aware that her conduct was *inexcusable*, her faults had been *involuntary*, and her sorrow was *inexpressible*; her *inexperience* and her *infatuation* her only apology; that her *infelicity* at her mistress's displeasure would *inevitably* increase her sufferings; assured her that she was not *incorrigible*, and that if her mistress would only indulge her with forgiveness, as she hoped to *inherit* heaven she would never *incur* her anger by committing the same fault again. Satisfied with this assurance, the Honourable Miss Delmar softened down, and not only forgave, but actually took the child into her lap that Bella might read the Bible which she had presented her with. Reader, the child who had this great honour conferred upon him, who actually laid in the immaculate lap, on the apron of immaculate snowy whiteness of the immaculate Honourable Miss Delmar, was no other person than the narrator of this history—or, if you please it, the Hero of this Tale.

That my mother had so far smoothed things pretty well must be acknowledged; but it was to be presumed that her husband might not be pleased at so unusual an occurrence, and already the sneers and innuendoes of the servants' hall were not wanting. It appeared, however, that an interview had taken place between Ben and Captain Delmar shortly after my making my appearance: what occurred did not transpire, but this is certain that, upon the marine's return to the kitchen, one of the grooms, who ventured to banter him, received such a sound thrashing from Ben that it put an end to all further joking. As Ben had taken up the affair so seriously, it was presumed that if there had been anticipation of the hymeneal rites he was himself the party who had been hasty; and that now he was married, he was resolved to resent any impertinent remarks upon his conduct. At all events, the question now became one of less interest, as the scandal was of less importance; and as Ben had made known his determination to resent any remarks upon the subject, not a word more was said, at all events when he was present.

In due time I was christened, and so completely was my mother reinstated in the good graces of her mistress, that as Captain Delmar had volunteered to stand my sponsor, the Honourable Miss Delmar gave the necessary female security; at the particular request of my mother, the captain consented that I should bear his own Christian name, and I was duly registered in the church books as Percival Keene.

Chapter Two

There is no security in this world. A dissolution of Parliament took place, and on the following election the Honourable Captain Delmar's constituents, not being exactly pleased at the total indifference which he had shown to their interests, took upon themselves to elect another member in his stead, who, as Captain Delmar had previously done, promised everything, and in all probability would follow the honourable captain's example by performing nothing. The loss of his election was followed up by the loss of his ship, his majesty's government not considering it necessary that Captain Delmar (now that he had leisure to attend to his professional duties) should retain his command. The frigate, therefore, was paid off, and recommissioned by another captain who had friends in Parliament.

As Ben Keene belonged to the marine corps, he could not, of course, remain as valet to Captain Delmar, but was ordered, with the rest of the detachment, to the barracks at Chatham; my mother, although she was determined that she would not live at barracks, was not sorry to leave the Hall, where she could not fail to perceive that she was, from her imprudent conduct, no longer treated with the respect or cordiality to which she had been previously accustomed. She was most anxious to quit a place in which her disgrace was so well known; and Captain Delmar having given her his advice, which coincided with her own ideas, and also a very munificent present to enable her to set up housekeeping, took his departure from the Hall. My mother returned to her room as the wheels of his carriage rattled over the gravel of the drive, and many were the bitter tears which she shed over her unconscious boy.

The following day the Honourable Miss Delmar sent for her; as usual, commenced with a tedious lecture, which, as before, was wound up at parting with a handsome present. The day after my mother packed up her trunks, and with me in her arms set off to Chatham, where we arrived safely, and immediately went into furnished lodgings. My mother was a clever, active woman, and the presents which she had at different times received amounted to a considerable sum of money, over which her husband had never ventured to assert any claim.

Indeed, I must do Ben Keene the justice to say that he had the virtue of humility. He felt that his wife was in every way his superior and that it was only under peculiar circumstances that he could have aspired to her. He was, therefore, submissive to her in everything, consenting to every proposal that was made by her, and guided by her opinion. When, therefore, on her arrival at Chatham, she pointed out how impossible it would be for one brought up as she had been to associate with the women in the barracks, and that she considered it advisable that she should set up some business by which she might gain a respectable livelihood, Ben, although he felt that this would be a virtual separation *a mensâ et thoro*, named no objections. Having thus obtained the consent of her husband, who considered her so much his superior as to be infallible, my mother, after much cogitation, resolved that she would embark her capital in a circulating library and stationer's shop; for she argued that selling paper, pens, and sealing-wax was a commerce which would secure to her customers of the better class. Accordingly, she hired a house close to the barracks, with a very good-sized shop below, painting and papering it very smartly; there was much taste in all her arrangements, and although the expenses of the outlay and the first year's rent had swallowed up a considerable portion of the money she had laid by, it soon proved that she had calculated well, and her shop became a sort of lounge for the officers, who amused themselves with her smartness and vivacity, the more so as she had a talent for repartee, which men like to find in a very pretty woman.

In a short time my mother became quite the rage, and it was a mystery how so pretty and elegant a person could have become the wife of a private marine. It was however, ascribed to her having been captivated with the very handsome person and figure of her husband, and having yielded to her feelings in a moment of infatuation. The ladies patronised her circulating library; the officers

and gentlemen purchased her stationery. My mother then added gloves, perfumery, canes, and lastly cigars, to her previous assortment and before she had been a year in business, found that she was making money very fast, and increasing her customers every day. My mother had a great deal of tact; with the other sex she was full of merriment and fond of joking, consequently a great favourite; towards her own sex her conduct was quite the reverse; she assumed a respectful, prudish air, blended with a familiarity which was never offensive; she was, therefore, equally popular with her own sex, and prospered in every sense of the word. Had her husband been the least inclined to have asserted his rights, the position which she had gained was sufficient to her reducing him to a state of subjection. She had raised herself, unaided, far above him; he saw her continually chatting and laughing with his own officers, to whom he was compelled to make a respectful salute whenever they passed by him; he could not venture to address her, or even to come into the shop, when his officers were there, or it would have been considered disrespectful towards them; and as he could not sleep out of barracks, all his intercourse with her was to occasionally slink down by the area, to find something better to eat than he could have in his own mess, or obtain from her an occasional shilling to spend in beer. Ben, the marine, found at last that somehow or another, his wife had slipped out of his hands; that he was nothing more than a pensioner on her bounty a slave to her wishes, and a fetcher and carrier at her command, and he resigned himself quietly to his fate, as better men have done before.

Chapter Three

I think that the reader will agree with me that my mother showed in her conduct great strength of character. She had been compelled to marry a man whom she despised, and to whom she felt herself superior in every respect; she had done so to save her reputation. That she had been in error is true but situation and opportunity had conspired against her; and when she found out the pride and selfishness of the man to whom she was devoted, and for whom she had sacrificed so much,—when her ears were wounded by proposals from his lips that she should take such a step to avoid the scandal arising from their intimacy—when at the moment that he made such a proposition, and the veil fell down and revealed the heart of man in its selfishness, it is not to be wondered that, with bitter tears, arising from wounded love, anger, and despair at her hopeless position, she consented. After having lost all she valued, what did she care for the future? It was but one sacrifice more to make, one more proof of her devotion and obedience. But there are few women who, like my mother, would have recovered her position to the extent that she did. Had she not shown such determination, had she consented to have accompanied her husband to the barracks, and have mixed up with the other wives of the men, she would have gradually sunk down to their level; to this she could not consent. Having once freed herself from her thralldom, he immediately sunk down to his level, as she rose up to a position in which, if she could not ensure more than civility and protection, she was at all events secure from insult and ill-treatment.

Such was the state of affairs when I had arrived at the important age of six years, a comic-looking, laughing urchin, petted by the officers, and as full of mischief as a tree full of monkeys. My mother's business had so much increased, that, about a year previous to this date, she had found it necessary to have some one to assist her, and had decided upon sending for her sister Amelia to live with her. It was, however, necessary to obtain her mother's consent. My grandmother had never seen my mother since the interview which she had had with her at Madeline Hall shortly after her marriage with Ben the marine. Latterly, however, they had corresponded; for my mother, who was too independent to seek her mother when she was merely the wife of a private marine, now that she was in flourishing circumstances had first tendered the olive branch, which had been accepted, as soon as my grandmother found that she was virtually separated from her husband. As my grandmother found it rather lonely at the isolated house in which she resided, and Amelia declared herself bored to death, it was at last agreed that my grandmother and my aunt Amelia should both come and take up their residence with my mother, and in due time they arrived. Milly, as my aunt was called, was three years younger than my mother, very pretty and as smart as her sister, perhaps a little more demure in her look, but with more mischief in her disposition. My grandmother was a cross, spiteful old woman; she was very large in her person, but very respectable in her appearance. I need not say that Miss Amelia did not lessen the attraction at the circulating library, which after her arrival was even more frequented by the officers than before.

My aunt Milly was very soon as fond of me as I was of mischief; indeed it is not to be wondered at, for I was a type of the latter. I soon loved her better than my mother, for she encouraged me in all my tricks. My mother looked grave, and occasionally scolded me; my grandmother slapped me hard and rated me continually; but reproof or correction from the two latter were of no avail; and the former, when she wished to play any trick which she dared not do herself, employed me as her agent; so that I obtained the whole credit for what were her inventions, and I may safely add, underwent the whole blame and punishment; but that I cared nothing for; her caresses, cakes, and sugar-plums, added to my natural propensity, more than repaid me for the occasional severe rebukes of my mother, and the vindictive blows I received from the long fingers of my worthy grandmother. Moreover, the officers took much notice of me, and it must be admitted, that, although I positively refused to learn my letters, I was a very forward child. My great patron was a Captain Bridgeman, a very thin,

elegantly-made man, who was continually performing feats of address and activity; occasionally I would escape with him and go down to the mess, remain at dinner, drink toasts, and, standing on the mess-table, sing two or three comic songs which he had taught me. I sometimes returned a little merry with the bumpers, which made my mother very angry, my old grandmother to hold up her hands, and look at the ceiling through her spectacles, and my aunt Milly as merry as myself. Before I was eight years old, I had become so notorious, that any prank played in the town, any trick undiscovered, was invariably laid to my account; and many were the applications made to my mother for indemnification for broken windows and other damage done, too often, I grant, with good reason, but very often when I had been perfectly innocent of the misdemeanour. At last I was voted a common nuisance, and every one, except my mother and my aunt Milly, declared that it was high time that I went to school.

One evening the whole of the family were seated at tea in the back parlour. I was sitting very quietly and demurely in a corner, a sure sign that I was in mischief, and so indeed I was (for I was putting a little gunpowder into my grandmother's snuff-box, which I had purloined, just that she might "smell powder," as they say at sea, without danger of life or limb), when the old woman addressed my mother—

"Bella, is that boy never going to school? it will be the ruin of him."

"What will be the ruin of him, mother?" rejoined my aunt Milly; "going to school?"

"Hold your nonsense, child: you are as bad as the boy himself," replied granny. "Boys are never ruined by education; girls sometimes are."

Whether my mother thought that this was an innuendo reflecting upon any portion of her own life, I cannot tell; but she replied very tartly.

"You're none the worse for my education, mother, or you would not be sitting here."

"Very true, child," replied granny; "but recollect, neither would you have married a marine—a private marine, Bella, while your sister looks up to the officers. Ay," continued the old woman, leaving off her knitting and looking at her daughter, "and is likely to get one, too, if she plays her cards well—that Lieutenant Flat can't keep out of the shop." (My granny having at this moment given me an opportunity to replace her snuff-box, I did not fail to profit by it; and as I perceived her knitting-pin had dropped on the floor, I stuck it into the skirt of her gown behind, so that whenever she looked for it, it was certain ever to be behind her.)

"Mr Flat is of a very respectable family, I hear say," continued my grandmother.

"And a great fool," interrupted my mother. "I hope Milly won't listen to him."

"He's an officer," replied my granny, "not a private."

"Well, mother, I prefer my private marine, for I can make him do as I please; if he's a private, I'm commanding officer, and intend so to be as long as I live."

"Well, well, Bella, let us say no more on the old score; but that boy must go to school. Deary me, I have dropped my needle."

My grandmother rose, and turned round and round, looking for her needle, which, strange to say, she could not find; she opened her snuff-box, and took a pinch to clear her optics. "Deary me, why, what's the matter with my snuff? and where can that needle be? Child, come and look for the needle; don't be sticking there in that corner."

I thought proper to obey the order and pretended to be very diligent in my search. Catching aunt Milly's eye, I pointed to the knitting-needle sticking in the hind skirts of my grandmother's gown, and then was down on my knees again, while my aunt held her handkerchief to her mouth to check her laughter.

A minute afterwards, Ben the marine first tapped gently, and then opened the door and came in; for at that late hour the officers were all at dinner, and the shop empty.

"There are three parcels of books for you to take," said my mother; "but you've plenty of time, so take down the tea-things, and get your tea in the kitchen before you go."

"You haven't got a shilling, Bella, about you? I want some 'baccy," said Ben, in his quiet way.

“Yes, here’s a shilling, Ben; but don’t drink too much beer,” replied my mother.

“Deary me, what can have become of my needle?” exclaimed my grandmother, turning round.

“Here it is, ma’am,” said Ben, who perceived it sticking in her skirt. “That’s Percival’s work, I’ll answer for it.”

My granny received the needle from Ben, and then turned to me: “You good-for-nothing boy; so you put the needle there, did you? pretending to look for it all the while; you shall go to school, sir, that you shall.”

“You said a needle, granny; I was looking for a needle: you didn’t say your knitting-pin; I could have told you where that was.”

“Yes, yes, those who hide can find; to school you go, or I’ll not stay in the house.”

Ben took the tea-tray out of the room. He had been well drilled in and out of barracks.

“I’ll go down in the kitchen to father,” cried I, for I was tired of sitting still.

“No, you won’t, sir,” said my mother, “you naughty boy; the kitchen is not the place for you, and if ever I hear of you smoking a pipe again—”

“Captain Bridgeman smokes,” replied I.

“Yes, sir, he smokes cigars; but a child like you must not smoke a pipe.”

“And now come here, sir,” said my granny, who had the lid of her snuff-box off, and held it open in her hand; “what have you been doing with my snuff?”

“Why, granny, have I had your snuff-box the whole day?”

“How should I know?—a boy like you, with every finger a fish-hook; I do believe you have; I only wish I could find you out. I had fresh snuff this morning.”

“Perhaps they made a mistake at the shop, mother,” said aunt Milly; “they are very careless.”

“Well, I can’t tell: I must have some more; I can’t take this.”

“Throw it in the fire, granny,” said I; “and I’ll run with the box and get it full again.”

“Well, I suppose it’s the best thing I can do,” replied the old woman, who went to the grate, and leaning over, poured the snuff out on the live coals. The result was a loud explosion and a volume of smoke, which burst out of the grate into her face—the dinner and lappets singed, her spectacles lifted from her nose, and her face as black as a sweep’s. The old woman screamed, and threw herself back; in so doing, she fell over the chair upon which she had been sitting, and, somehow or another, tripped me up, and lay with all her weight upon me. I had been just attempting to make my escape during the confusion—for my mother and Milly were equally frightened—when I found myself completely smothered by the weight of my now almost senseless granny, and, as I have before mentioned, she was a very corpulent woman. Had I been in any other position I should not have suffered so much; but I had unfortunately fallen flat on my back, and was now lying with my face upwards, pressed upon by the broadest part of the old woman’s body; my nose was flattened, and my breath completely stopped. How long my granny might have remained there groaning I cannot tell; probably, as I was somewhat a spoiled child before this, it might have ended in her completely finishing me; but she was roused up from her state of half syncope by a vigorous attack from my teeth, which, in the agony of suffocation, I used with preternatural force of jaw from one so young. I bit right through everything she had on, and as my senses were fast departing, my teeth actually met with my convulsive efforts. My granny, roused by the extreme pain, rolled over on her side, and then it was that my mother and aunt, who supposed that I had made my escape from the room, discovered me lifeless, and black in the face. They ran to me, but I still held on with my teeth, nor could I be separated from my now screaming relative, until the admission of fresh air, and a plentiful sprinkling of cold water brought me to my senses, when I was laid on the sofa utterly exhausted. It certainly was a narrow escape, and it may be said that the “biter was nearly bit.” As for my granny, she recovered her fright and her legs, but she did not recover her temper; she could not sit down without a pillow on the chair for many days, and, although little was said to me in consequence of the danger I had incurred, yet there was an evident abhorrence of me on the part of the old woman, a quiet manner about my mother, and

a want of her usual hilarity on the part of my aunt, which were to me a foreboding of something unpleasant. A few days brought to light what was the result of various whisperings and consultations. It was on a fine Monday morning, that Ben made his appearance at an unusually early hour; my cap was put on my head, my cloak over my shoulders; Ben took me by the hand, having a covered basket in the other, and I was led away like a lamb to the butcher. As I went out there was a tear in the eyes of my aunt Milly, a melancholy over the countenance of my mother, and a twinkling expression of satisfaction in my grandmother's eyes, which even her spectacles could not conceal from me: the fact was, my grandmother had triumphed, and I was going to school.

Chapter Four

As soon as I was clear of the door, I looked up into Ben's face and said, "Father, where are we going?"

"Well," replied he, "I am going to take you to school."

"School! What am I going to school for?" replied I.

"For biting your grandmother, I expect, in the first place, and to get a little learning, and a good deal of flogging, if what they say is true! I never was at school myself."

"What do you learn, and why are you flogged?"

"You learn to read, and to write, and to count; I can't do either—more's the pity; and you are flogged, because without flogging, little boys can't learn anything."

This was not a very satisfactory explanation. I made no further inquiries, and we continued our way in silence until we arrived at the school door; there was a terrible buzz inside. Ben tapped, the door opened, and a volume of hot air burst forth, all the fresh air having been consumed in repeating the fresh lessons for the day. Ben walked up between the forms, and introduced me to the schoolmaster, whose name was Mr Thadeus O'Gallagher, a poor scholar from Ireland, who had set up an establishment at half-a-guinea a quarter for day scholars; he was reckoned a very severe master, and the children were kept in better order in his school than in any other establishment of the kind in the town; and I presume that my granny had made inquiries to that effect, as there were one or two schools of the same kind much nearer to my mother's house. Ben, who probably had a great respect for learning, in consequence of his having none himself, gave a military salute to Mr O'Gallagher, saying, with his hand still to his hat, "A new boy, sir, come to school."

"Oh, by the powers! don't I know him?" cried Mr O'Gallagher; "it's the young gentleman who bit a hole in his grandmother; Master Keene, as they call him. Keen teeth, at all events. Lave him with me; and that's his dinner in the basket I presume; lave that too. He'll soon be a good boy, or it will end in a blow-up."

Ben put down the basket, turned on his heel, and left the schoolroom, and me standing by the throne of my future pedagogue—I say throne, because he had not a desk, as schoolmasters generally have, but a sort of square daïs, about eighteen inches high, on which was placed another oblong superstructure of the same height, serving him for a seat; both parts were covered with some patched and torn old drugget, and upon subsequent examination I found them to consist of three old claret cases without covers, which he had probably picked up very cheap; two of them turned upside down, so as to form the lower square, and the third placed in the same way upside down, upon the two lower. Mr O'Gallagher sat in great dignity upon the upper one, with his feet on the lower, being thus sufficiently raised upon an eminence to command a view of the whole of his pupils in every part of the school. He was not a tall man, but very square built, with carrot hair and very bushy red whiskers; to me he appeared a most formidable person, especially when he opened his large mouth and displayed his teeth, when I was reminded of the sign of the Red Lion close to my mother's house. I certainly never had been before so much awed during my short existence as I was with the appearance of my pedagogue, who sat before me somewhat in the fashion of a Roman tribune, holding in his hand a short round ruler, as if it were his truncheon of authority. I had not been a minute in the school before I observed him to raise his arm; away went the ruler whizzing through the air, until it hit the skull of the lad for whom it was intended at the other end of the schoolroom. The boy, who had been talking to his neighbour, rubbed his poll, and whined.

"Why don't you bring back my ruler, you spalpeen?" said Mr O'Gallagher. "Be quick, Johnny Target, or it will end in a blow-up."

The boy, who was not a little confused with the blow, sufficiently recovered his senses to obey the order, and whimpering as he came up, returned the ruler to the hands of Mr O'Gallagher.

“That tongue of yours will get you into more trouble than it will business, I expect, Johnny Target; it’s an unruly member, and requires a constant ruler over it.” Johnny Target rubbed his head and said nothing.

“Master Keene,” said he, after a short pause, “did you see what a tundering tump on the head that boy got just now, and do you know what it was for?”

“No,” replied I.

“Where’s your manners, you animal? No ‘If you please.’ For the future, you must not forget to say, ‘No, sir,’ or, ‘No, Mr O’Gallagher.’ D’ye mind me—now say yes—what?”

“Yes, what!”

“Yes, what! you little ignoramus; say ‘yes, Mr O’Gallagher,’ and recollect, as the parish clerk says, ‘this is the last time of asking.’”

“Yes, Mr O’Gallagher.”

“Ah! now you see, there’s nothing like coming to school—you’ve learn’t manners already; and now, to go back again, as to why Johnny Target had the rap on the head, which brought tears into his eyes? I’ll just tell you, it was for talking; you see, the first thing for a boy to learn, is to hold his tongue, and that shall be your lesson for the day; you’ll just sit down there and if you say one word during the whole time you are in the school, it will end in a blow-up; that means, on the present occasion, that I’ll skin you alive as they do the eels, which being rather keen work, will just suit your constitution.” I had wit enough to feel assured that Mr O’Gallagher was not to be trifled with, so I took my seat, and amused myself with listening to the various lessons which the boys came up to say, and the divers punishments inflicted—few escaped. At last, the hour of recreation and dinner arrived, the boys were dismissed, each seized his basket, containing his provisions, or ran home to get his meal with his parents: I found myself sitting in the school-room *tête-à-tête* with Mr O’Gallagher, and feeling very well inclined for my dinner I cast a wistful eye at my basket, but I said nothing; Mr O’Gallagher, who appeared to have been in thought, at last said—

“Mr Keene, you may now go out of school, and scream till you’re hoarse, just to make up for lost time.”

“May I take my dinner, sir?” inquired I.

“Is it your dinner you mane?—to be sure you may; but, first, I’ll just look into the basket and its contents; for you see, Mr Keene, there’s some victuals that don’t agree with larning; and if you eat them, you’ll not be fit for your work when your play-hours are over. What’s easy of digestion will do; but what’s bad for little boys’ stomachs may get you into a scrape, and then it will end in a blow-up; that is, you’ll have a taste of the ferrule or the rod—two assistants of mine, to whom I’ve not yet had the pleasure of introducing you—all in good time. If what I’ve hear of you be true, you and they will be better acquainted afore long.”

Mr O’Gallagher then examined the contents of my basket; my aunt Milly had taken care that I should be well provided: there was a large paper of beef sandwiches, a piece of bread and cheese, and three or four slices of seed-cake. Mr O’Gallagher opened all the packages, and, after a pause, said—

“Now, Master Keene, d’ye think you would ever guess how I came by all my larning, and what I fed upon when it was pumped into me? Then I’ll tell you; it was dry bread, with a little bit of cheese when I could get it, and that wasn’t often. Bread and cheese is the food to make a scholar of ye; and mayhap one slice of the cake mayn’t much interfere, so take them, and run away to the play-ground as fast as you can; and, d’ye hear me, Master Keene, recollect your grace before meat—‘For what we have received, the Lord make us truly thankful.’ Now, off wid you. The rest of the contents are confiscated for my sole use, and your particular benefit.”

Mr O’Gallagher grinned as he finished his oration; and he looked so much like a wild beast, that I was glad to be off as fast as I could. I turned round as I went out of the door, and perceived that the sandwiches were disappearing with wonderful rapidity; but I caught his eye: it was like that of a tiger’s at his meal, and I was off at redoubled speed.

Chapter Five

As soon as I gained the play-ground, which was, in fact, nothing more than a small piece of waste land, to which we had no more claim than any other people, I sat down by a post, and commenced my dinner off what Mr O’Gallagher had thought proper to leave me. I was afraid of him, it is true, for his severity to the other boys convinced me that he would have little mercy upon me, if I dared to thwart him; but indignation soon began to obtain the mastery over my fears and I began to consider if I could not be even with him for his barefaced robbery of my dinner; and then I reflected whether it would not be better to allow him to take my food if I found out that by so doing he treated me well; and I resolved, at all events, to delay a little. The hour of play was now over, and a bell summoned us all to school; I went in with the others and took my seat where Mr O’Gallagher had before desired me.

As soon as all was silent, my pedagogue beckoned me to him.

“Now, Mr Keene,” said he, “you’ll be so good as to lend me your ears—that is, to listen while I talk to you a little bit. D’ye know how many roads there are to larning? Hold your tongue. I ask you because I know you don’t know, and because I’m going to tell you. There are exactly three roads: the first is the eye, my jewel; and if a lad has a sharp eye like yours, it’s a great deal that will get into his head by that road; you’ll know a thing when you see it again, although you mayn’t know your own father—that’s a secret only known to your mother. The second road to larning, young spalpeen, is the ear; and if you mind all people say, and hear all you can, you’ll gain a great many truths and just ten times as much more in the shape of lies. You see the wheat and the chaff will come together, and you must pick the latter out of the former at any seasonable future opportunity. Now we come to the third road to larning, which is quite a different sort of road; because, you see, the two first give us little trouble, and we trot along almost whether we will or not: the third and grand road is the head itself, which requires the eye and the ear to help it; and two other assistants, which we call memory and application; so you see we have the visual, then the aural, and then the mental roads—three hard words which you don’t understand, and which I shan’t take the trouble to explain to such an animal as you are; for I never throw away pearls to swine, as the saying is. Now, then, Mr Keene, we must come to another part of our history. As there are three roads to larning, so there are three manes or implements by which boys are stimulated to larn: the first is the ruler, which you saw me shy at the thick skull of Johnny Target, and you see’d what a rap it gave him; well, then, the second is the ferrule—a thing you never heard of, perhaps; but I’ll show it you; here it is,” continued Mr O’Gallagher, producing a sort of flat wooden ladle with a hole in the centre of it. “The ruler is for the head, as you have seen; the ferrule is for the hand. You have seen me use the ruler; now I’ll show you what I do with the ferrule.”

“You Tommy Goskin, come here, sir.”

Tommy Goskin put down his book, and came up to his master with a good deal of doubt in his countenance.

“Tommy Goskin, you didn’t say your lesson well to-day.”

“Yes I did, Mr O’Gallagher,” replied Tommy, “you said I did yourself.”

“Well then, sir, you didn’t say it well yesterday,” continued Mr O’Gallagher.

“Yes I did, sir,” replied the boy, whimpering.

“And is it you who dares to contradict me?” cried Mr O’Gallagher; “at all events, you won’t say it well to-morrow, so hold out your right hand.”

Poor Tommy held it out, and roared lustily at the first blow, wringing his fingers with the smart.

“Now your left hand, sir; fair play is a jewel; always carry the dish even.”

Tommy received a blow on his left hand, which was followed up with similar demonstrations of suffering.

“There sir you may go now,” said Mr O’Gallagher, “and mind you don’t do it again; or else there’ll be a blow-up. And now Master Keene, we come to the third and last, which is the birch for the tail—here it is—have you ever had a taste?”

“No, sir,” replied I.

“Well, then, you have that pleasure to come, and come it will, I don’t doubt, if you and I are a few days longer acquainted. Let me see—”

Here Mr O’Gallagher looked round the school, as if to find a culprit; but the boys, aware of what was going on, kept their eyes so attentively to their books, that he could not discover one; at last he singled out a fat chubby lad.

“Walter Puddock, come here, sir.”

Walter Puddock came accordingly; evidently he gave himself up for lost.

“Walter Puddock, I just have been telling Master Keene that you’re the best Latin scholar in the whole school. Now, sir, don’t make me out to be a liar—do me credit,—or, by the blood of the O’Gallaghers, I’ll flog ye till you’re as thin as a herring. What’s the Latin for a cocked hat, as the Roman gentlemen wore with their *togeys*?”

Walter Puddock hesitated a few seconds, and then, without venturing a word of remonstrance, let down his trousers.

“See now the guilty tief, he knows what’s coming. Shame upon you, Walter Puddock, to disgrace your preceptor so, and make him tell a lie to young Master Keene. Where’s Phil Mooney? Come along, sir, and hoist Walter Puddock: it’s no larning that I can drive into you, Phil, but it’s sartain sure that by your manes I drive a little into the other boys.”

Walter Puddock, as soon as he was on the back of Phil Mooney, received a dozen cuts with the rod, well laid on. He bore it without flinching, although the tears rolled down his cheeks.

“There, Walter Puddock, I told you it would end in a blow-up; go to your dictionary, you dirty blackguard, and do more credit to your education and superior instruction from a certain person who shall be nameless.”

Mr O’Gallagher laid the rod on one side, and then continued—

“Now, Master Keene, I’ve just shown you the three roads to larning, and also the three implements to persuade little boys to larn; if you don’t travel very fast by the three first, why you will be followed up very smartly by the three last—a nod’s as good as a wink to a blind horse, any day; and one thing more, you little spalpeen, mind that there’s more mustard to the sandwiches to-morrow, or else it will end in a blow-up. Now you’ve got the whole theory of the art of tuition, Master Keene; please the pigs, we’ll commence with the practice to-morrow.”

My worthy pedagogue did not address me any more during that day; the school broke up at five, and I made haste home, thinking over all that had passed in the school-room.

My granny and mother were both anxious to know what had passed; the first hoped that I had been flogged, the second that I had not, but I refused to communicate. I assumed a haughty, indifferent air, for I was angry with my mother, and as for my grandmother, I hated her. Aunt Milly, however, when we were alone, did not question me in vain. I told her all that had passed; she bade me be of good heart, and that I should not be ill-treated if she could help it.

I replied, that if I were ill-treated, I would have my revenge somehow or another. I then went down to the barracks, to the rooms of Captain Bridgeman, and told him what had occurred. He advised me to laugh at the ruler, the ferrule, and the rod. He pointed out to me the necessity of my going to school and learning to read and write, at the same time was very indignant at the conduct of Mr O’Gallagher, and told me to resist in every way any injustice or tyranny, and that I should be sure of his support and assistance, provided that I did pay attention to my studies.

Fortified by the advice and protection of my two great friends, I made up my mind that I would learn as fast as I could, but if treated ill, that I would die a martyr, rather than yield to oppression;

at all events, I would, if possible, play Mr O’Gallagher a trick for every flogging or punishment I received; and with this laudable resolution I was soon fast asleep, too fast even to dream.

Chapter Six

When my aunt Milly called me in the morning, that I might be up and have my breakfast in time for school, I felt as if two years had passed over my head during the last twenty-four hours. I had never witnessed tyranny until the day before, and my blood was heated with indignation: I felt myself capable of anything and everything.

My anger was about as great towards my mother and grandmother for having sent me to such a place, as it was against Mr O’Gallagher. Instead of going up and kissing my mother, I paid no attention to either her or my grandmother, much to the mortification of the former and surprise of the latter, who said, in a very cross manner, “Where’s your manners, child? why don’t you say good morning?”

“Because I have not been long enough at school to learn manners, granny.”

“Come and kiss me before you go, my child,” said my mother.

“No, mother; you have sent me to school to be beat, and I never will kiss you again.”

“Naughty, good-for-nothing boy!” exclaimed my granny; “what a bad heart you must have.”

“No, that he has not,” cried my aunt Milly. “Sister should have inquired what sort of a school it was before she sent him.”

“I made every inquiry,” replied my granny; “he can’t play tricks there.”

“Won’t I?” cried I, “but I will; and not only there but here. I’ll be even with you all; yes, I’ll be even with you, granny, if I die for it.”

“Why, you audacious wretch, I’ve great a mind to—”

“I dare say you have, but recollect I can bite; you’d better be quiet, granny, or, as the master says, ‘it will end in a blow-up.’”

“Only hear the little wretch,” said my granny, lifting up her hands; “I shall see you hanged yet, you ungrateful child.”

“I’m not ungrateful,” replied I, throwing my arms round Milly’s neck, and kissing her with fervour; “I can love those who love me.”

“Then you don’t love me?” said my mother, reproachfully.

“I did yesterday, but I don’t now; but it’s time for me to go, aunt; is my basket ready? I don’t want father to take me to school, I can do without him, and when I don’t choose to go any more, I won’t; recollect that, mother.” So saying, I seized my basket and quitted the room. There was a long consultation, I found, after my departure: my mother, when my aunt had informed her of Mr O’Gallagher’s conduct, wished to remove me instantly; my grandmother insisted upon it that there was not a word of truth in what I had said, and threatened that if I did not remain at that very school, she would leave Chatham, and take my aunt with her. As my mother could not part with aunt Milly, the consequence was, that my grandmother gained the day.

I arrived in good time, and took my seat near my master. I preferred doing this, as I had had a long conversation with Captain Bridgeman who told me that although Mr O’Gallagher had put the ruler down as punishment Number 1, the ferrule Number 2, and the birch as Number 3, and of course they were considered to be worse as the number rose, that he considered it to be the very contrary, as he had had them all well applied when he was at school; he ordered me, therefore, never to hold out my hand to the ferrule, by which refusal I should, of course, be flogged; but he assured me that the birch, especially when it is given often, was a mere nothing. Now I considered that the surest way to avoid the ruler was to sit close to my master, who could then have no pretence for sending it at my head; the fact was I had determined to save the more noble portions of my body, and leave Mr O’Gallagher to do what he pleased with the other: to do him justice, he lost no time.

“Come here, Mr Keene,” said he, “where’s your manners? why don’t you say good morning to your preceptor? Can you read at all?”

“No, sir.”

“D’ye know your letters?”

“Some of them—I think I do, sir.”

“Some of them—I suppose about two out of six-and-twenty. It’s particular attention that’s been paid to your education, I perceive; you’ve nothing to unlearn anyhow, that’s something. Now, sir, do you think that a classical scholar and a gentleman born, like me, is to demane myself by hearing you puzzle at the alphabet? You’re quite mistaken, Mr Keene, you must gain your first elements second-hand; so where’s Timothy Ruddel? You, Timothy Ruddel, you’ll just teach this young Master Keene his whole alphabet, and take care, at the same time, that you know your own lessons, or it will end in a blow-up; and you, Master Keene, if you have not larnt your whole alphabet perfect by dinner time, why you’ll have a small taste of Number 2, just as a hint to what’s coming next. Go along, you little ignorant blackguard; and you, Timothy Ruddel, look out for a taste of Number 3, if you don’t larn him and yourself all at once, and at the same time.”

I was very well pleased with this arrangement; I had resolved to learn, and I was doubly stimulated to learn now, to save poor Timothy Ruddel from an unjust punishment.

In the three hours I was quite perfect, and Timothy Ruddel, who was called up before me, was also able to say his lesson without a blunder very much to the disappointment of Mr O’Gallagher, who observed, “So you’ve slipped through my fingers, have you, this time, Master Timothy? Never mind, I’ll have you yet; and, moreover, there’s Master Keene to go through the fiery furnace.” Just before dinner time I was called up; with my memory of many of the letters, and the assistance I had received from Timothy Ruddel, I felt very confident.

“What letter’s that, sir?” said Mr O’Gallagher.

“A B C D E.”

“You little blackguard, I’ll dodge you; you think to escape, you?”

“V, X, P, O.”

Much to Mr O’Gallagher’s surprise I said them all without one mistake. Instead of commendation I received abuse. “By all the powers,” exclaimed my pedagogue, “but everything seems to go wrong to-day; my hand has been completely idle; this will never do; didn’t you tell me, Mr Keene, that you didn’t know your letters?”

“I said I knew some of them, sir.”

“If my memory is correct, Mr Keene, you told me that you knew two out of twenty-six.”

“No, sir, you said that.”

“That’s just as much as to tell me, your preceptor, a classical scholar, and a Milesian gentleman to boot, that I lie, for which I intend to have satisfaction, Mr Keene, I assure you. You’re guilty in two counts, as they say at the Old Bailey, where you’ll be called up to some of these days, as sure as you stand there; one count is in telling me a lie, in saying you did not know your alphabet, when it’s quite clear that you did; and, secondly, in giving me the lie, by stating that I said what you said. You thought to escape me, but you’re mistaken, Mr Keene; so now, if you please, we will just have a taste of Number 2. Hould out your hand, Mr Keene: d’ye hear me sir? hould out your hand.”

But this I positively refused to do. “You won’t, won’t you? Well, then, we must increase the punishment for our contempt of court, and at once commence with Number 3, which we intended to reserve till to-morrow. Come along, Phil Mooney, there’s fresh mate for you to carry, and come out Number 3, here’s fresh ground for you to travel over.”

Phil Mooney and the birch soon made their appearance: I was hoisted by the one and scourged by the other.

The first taste of the birch is anything but agreeable; I could only compare it to the dropping of molten lead. I tried all I could to prevent crying out, but it was impossible, and at last I roared like a mad bull; and I was as mad as a bull, and as dangerous. Could I have picked up any weapon at the moment that I was dropped from the shoulders of Phil Mooney, it would have gone hard with Mr O’Gallagher. My rage was greater than my agony. I stood when I had been landed, my chest heaving,

my teeth set fast, and my apparel still in disorder. The school was dismissed, and I was left alone with the savage pedagogue, who immediately took up my basket, and began to rummage the contents.

“Make yourself decent, Mr Keene, and don’t be shocking my modesty, and taking away my appetite. Did you mention the mustard, as I desired you? Upon my faith, but you’re a nice boy and do justice to the representations of your grandmother, and when you see her you may tell her that I did not forget the promise she exacted from me. You forgot all about the mustard, you little blackguard. If Phil Mooney was here I would give you another taste to freshen your memory for to-morrow; however, to-morrow will do as well, if the mistake’s not corrected. Here, take your victuals, and good appetite to you, you little monster of iniquity.”

Mr O’Gallagher tossed me some bread but this time reserved the cheese for his own eating. I had adjusted my dress, and I therefore left the school-room. I could not sit down without pain, so I leant against a post: the bread remained in my hand untouched; had it been the greatest delicacy in the world I could not have tasted a morsel; I was giddy from excess of feeling, my thoughts were rapidly chasing each other when I heard a voice close to me; I looked round, it was Walter Puddock, who had been flogged the day before.

“Never mind, Keene,” said he, kindly; “it hurts at first, but the more you get it the less you care for it; I don’t mind it a bit now; I cries, because he goes on flogging till you do, and it’s no use having more than you can help.”

“I didn’t deserve it,” replied I.

“That’s not necessary; you’ll get it, as we all do, whether you deserve it or not.”

“Well, I’ll try to deserve it in future,” replied I, clenching my fist; “I’ll be even with him.”

“Why, what can you do?”

“Wait a little, and you’ll see,” said I, walking away, for an idea had come into my head which I wished to follow up.

Soon afterwards the bell rang, and we returned to the schoolroom. I was put under the tuition of another boy, and took care to learn my lesson. Whether it was that he was tired with the exercise, for he flogged and ferruled a dozen during that afternoon, or that he thought that my morning dose had been sufficient, I received no more punishment on that day.

Chapter Seven

As soon as school was dismissed, I went straight to the rooms of Captain Bridgeman, and told him how I had been treated. As soon as he heard it, he exclaimed, "This is really too bad; I will go with you, and I will consult with your aunt Amelia."

It so happened that aunt Milly was alone in the shop when we arrived, and after a detail of what had passed, she told Captain Bridgeman that my grandmother had put me to that school out of feelings of ill-will for the tricks I had played, and had threatened that if I were removed she would leave Chatham and take her away with her. My mother required assistance in the shop, and was afraid to affront my grandmother, who was a very dictatorial, positive old woman, and would certainly keep her resolution; but that rather than I should be treated in such a barbarous manner she would insist upon my mother taking me away, or would herself leave the place.

"It would never do for you to leave us, Miss Amelia," replied Captain Bridgeman, "there are but few attractions in this place, and we cannot spare you; the whole corps would go into deep mourning."

"I don't want to leave the school," interrupted I; "I would not leave it till I am revenged, for all the world. Now, I'll tell you what I want to do—and do it I will, if he cuts me to pieces. He eats my sandwiches, and tells me if there's not more mustard to-morrow, he'll flog me. He shall have plenty of mustard, but he shall have something else. What can I put into the sandwiches, so as to half kill him?"

"Not a bad idea, my little Percival," said Captain Bridgeman; "I'll just ask the doctor how much calomel a man may take without a coroner's inquest being required."

"Yes, that will do nicely," said my aunt; "I'll take care he shall have mustard enough not to perceive it."

"Well, I'll go to the barracks and be back directly," said Captain Bridgeman.

"And I'm ready for the flogging as soon as the sandwiches are down his throat," replied I, laughing, "I don't care a fig for it."

Captain Bridgeman soon returned with forty grains of calomel, which he delivered into aunt Milly's hands. "That is as much as we dare give the strongest man without running great danger; we'll try the effect of that upon him, and if he don't improve, I think I shall go up to the school myself and threaten him."

"As for that," replied aunt Milly, "I'm sure that sister, if she hears what's going on, as she cannot take Percival away, will order her husband, Ben, to go up and thrash him."

"Not a bad idea, Miss Amelia, we'll try that if we find it necessary; at all events, we'll see who can persecute most."

"Granny has told him to treat me ill," said I, "that's very clear, from what he said; never mind, I'll make her sorry for it."

"Oh Percival! you must not do anything to granny," said aunt Milly, looking very archly; "I must not hear anything of the kind."

The next morning I set off with a full conviction that I should be flogged before night, and notwithstanding that, as full of joy as if I was going to the fair.

The morning passed as usual; I said my lesson, but not very well; I was thinking so much of my anticipated revenge, that I could not pay attention to my teacher, who was, as usual, one of the boys.

"Master Keene," said Mr O'Gallagher, "we'll let the account stand over till the evening, and then I'll give you a receipt in full; I may have one or two lines to add to it before the sun goes down; you'll not escape me this time, anyhow."

The boys went out at the dinner hour, leaving me, as before, to wait for my basket, after the tyrant had helped himself. I stood by him in silence while he was rummaging its contents.

"Now, Mr Keene, I'll see if you've remembered my particular injunction relative to the mustard."

“I told my aunt to put more mustard, sir,” replied I, humbly, “it she that cuts the sandwiches.”

“Well, then, if your aunt has not complied with your request, see if I don’t flay you alive, you little imp of abomination.”

The sandwiches were pulled out of the paper and tasted. “Down on your knees, Mr Keene, and thank all the blessed saints that your aunt has saved you from at least one-half of what I intended to administer to you this blessed afternoon, for she has doubled the mustard, you tief,” said Mr O’Gallagher, speaking with his mouth as full as it could hold. Down went sandwich after sandwich, until they had all disappeared. Oh! what joy was mine! I could have tossed up my cap and leapt in the air. Having received the bread and cheese, for he permitted me to have the latter on this occasion I went out and enjoyed my meal, delighted with Mr O’Gallagher’s having fallen into the trap I had laid for him.

The bell summoned us in, and all went on as usual for the first two hours, when I thought Mr O’Gallagher changed countenance and looked very pale. He continued, however, to hear the lessons, until at last I perceived him pass his hand up and down and across his stomach, as if he had had a twinge; a few minutes afterwards, he compressed his thick lips, and then put his hands to his abdomen.

“Ah! he begins to feel it now,” thought I; and sure enough he did; for the pain increased so rapidly that he lost all patience, and vented his feelings by beating with his ruler, on the heads of the whole class of boys standing up before him, till one or two dropped down, stunned with the blows. At last he dropped the ruler, and, pressing both hands to his stomach, he rolled himself backwards and forwards, and then twisted and distorted his legs till he could bear the pain no longer; and he gave vent to a tremendous Irish howl—grinning and grinding his teeth for a few seconds, and then howling again, writhing and twisting in evident agony—while the perspiration ran off his forehead.

“Och! murder! I’m poisoned sure. Lord save my sinful soul! Oh—oh—oh! eh—eh—eh! mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy! Oh holy St. Patrick! I’m kilt entirely!”—and so subdued was he at last by the pain, that he burst out into a flood of tears, crying and roaring like a child.

Again the paroxysms came on—“Murder, murder, murder!” shrieked the wretch at the highest pitch of his voice, so that he was heard at some distance, and some of the neighbours came in to inquire what was the matter.

Mr O’Gallagher was now in a fainting state, and leaning against the table, he could merely say in a low voice, “A doctor—quick—a doctor.”

The neighbours perceiving how ill he was, led him out of the school-rooms into his own apartment, one going for a doctor, and the others telling the boys they might all go home, a notice of which they gladly availed themselves.

I need hardly say, that I made all the haste I could to communicate the successful result of my trick to Milly and Captain Bridgeman. The medical man who was summoned, gave Mr O’Gallagher some very active medicine, which assisted to rid him of the calomel; of his having taken which, of course, the medical man was ignorant. The violence of the dose was, however, so great, and left him in such a state, that Mr O’Gallagher could not leave his room for three days, nor resume his seat in the school until a week had elapsed, during which I remained at home plotting still further mischief.

Mr O’Gallagher resumed his occupations, and I was again sent off to school. When I entered the school-room I found him looking very pale and cadaverous; as soon as he saw me his lips were drawn apart, and he showed his large white teeth, reminding me of the grinning of a hyena; he did not, however, say anything to me. My studies were resumed; I said my lesson perfectly, but was fully prepared for punishment. I was, however, agreeably disappointed; he did not punish either me or any of the other boys.

I afterwards found out the reason was, that, although necessity compelled him to re-open his school as soon as he could, he was too weak to undergo the fatigue of following up his favourite diversion.

When the dinner-hour arrived, and the boys were dismissed, I waited patiently to see what he would do with my basket, which stood beside him. "Take your basket, and eat your dinner, Master Keene," said he, walking out of the school-room into his own apartments. I could not help saying, "Won't you have the sandwiches, sir?"

He turned round and gave me a look so penetrating and so diabolical, that I felt sure that he knew to whom he had been indebted for his late severe illness.

From this day forward Mr O'G never interfered with the contents of my basket and I had my dinner all to myself. The shock which had been given to his constitution was so great, that for three or four months he may be said to have crawled to his school room, and I really began to think that the affair would turn out more serious than was intended; but gradually he regained his strength, and as he recovered his vigour, so did he resume his severity.

But I was a great gainer during the three or four months of quiet which reigned during Mr O'Gallagher's convalescence. Since I have been grown up, I have often thought, and am indeed confirmed in my opinion, that we lose rather than gain by being educated at too early an age. Commence with one child at three years, and with another at seven years old, and in ten years, the one whose brain was left fallow even till seven years old, will be quite as far, if not further advanced, than the child whose intellect was prematurely forced at the earlier age; this is a fact which I have since seen proved in many instances, and it certainly was corroborated in mine.

In six months I could read and write very fairly, and had commenced arithmetic; true, I was stimulated on by the advice of Captain Bridgeman, the love I bore my aunt Milly, and the hatred which I had for my master, which made me resolve that I would not deserve punishment on that score.

It was in May that I administered the dose to Mr O'Gallagher; in September he was quite well again, and the ruler, the ferrule, and the rod, were triumphantly at work. It is useless to say how often I was punished, for it was every day; always once, sometimes twice; I became completely callous to it, nay, laughed at it, but my mind was ever at work upon some mischief, in the way of retaliation.

I put little pancakes of cobblers' wax on Mr O'Gallagher's throne, and he had the pleasure of finding himself stuck fast by the breeches when he rose up to punish. I anointed the handle of the ferrule and rod with bird-lime; put dead cats under the claret cases, which composed his seat of authority, so that the smell would drive him distracted before he found it out. I drew up with a squirt, all the ink which was in the inkstands fixed in the writing-desks, so as not to be taken out of the sockets, and made good the deficiency with water, which put him to no little expense.

I once made him almost frantic, by rubbing his handkerchief which always laid by his side, and with which he was accustomed to wipe his face every five minutes (for he was profuse in his perspiration), with what is called cow-itch: not being aware of what was the cause, he wiped his face more and more, until he was as red as a peony, and the itching became intolerable.

On such occasions he never inquired who was the party, but called me and Phil Mooney. I, on the other hand, never said a word in way of expostulation. I took my flogging, which was as severe as he could give it, as a matter of course, quite satisfied with the exchange.

As Walter Puddock had told me, and, as I have no doubt, the Eton boys will confirm, after a certain quantity of flagellations, the skin becomes so hard as to make the punishment almost a matter of indifference and so I found it. So passed the time until the month of November, when I was fully enabled to pay off my worthy pedagogue for all that I was indebted to him.

Chapter Eight

The boys had been saving up all their money to purchase fireworks for the celebrated 5th of November—a day on which it was said that certain persons, finding it impossible to reform the Lords and Commons, had determined to get rid of them at once: why they have not been in similar danger every year since the first attempt was made, I know not; certain it is, that it is the only reform measure that can ever be effectual. Guy Fawkes and his confederates, whether Popish or Protestant, from the disregard of human life, certainly proved themselves the founders of a party, still existing, whose motto is, “Measures and not Men.”

But to proceed: Mr O’Gallagher had never before attempted to interfere with the vested rights of urchins on that day; being, however, in a most particular irascible humour, instead of a whole, he made it known that there would only be a half, holiday, and we were consequently all called in for morning lessons instead of carrying about, as we had intended, the effigy of the only true reformer that ever existed in this country.

This made us all very sulky and discontented in the first place, and our anxiety to get out of school was so great, that the lessons were not very perfect in the second. The ferrule and rod were called out and liberally administered; but what was our horror and dismay when Mr O’Gallagher, about an hour before dinner, announced to us that all the squibs and crackers, with which our pockets were crammed, were to be given up immediately; and that, as we had not said our lessons well, there would be no half-holiday, the whole school were in mute despair.

One by one were the boys summoned up to the throne of Mr O’Gallagher, and their pockets searched by Phil Mooney, who emptied them of their pyrotechnical contents, all of which were deposited on the daïs of Mr O’Gallagher’s throne, which, I have before observed, was composed of two empty claret cases turned upside down, surmounted by another, on which Mr O’Gallagher sat, all three covered with old green baize.

By the time that the whole school had been rifled, the heap of fireworks was very considerable, and Mr O’Gallagher, to prevent any of them being recovered by the boys, lifted up the claret case on which he sat, and which was on the top of the other two, and desired Phil Mooney to put them all underneath it. This was done; Mr O’Gallagher resumed his seat, and the lessons continued till the dinner hour arrived, but, alas! not the half-holiday or the fireworks.

The boys went out; some mournful, some angry, some sulky, some frightened; a few, a very few, declaiming against such injustice.

I was in a rage; my blood boiled; at last my invention came to my aid, and, without considering the consequences, I determined how to act.

As it was an hour and a half before school would commence, I hastened home, and, having spent all my money, begged aunt Milly to give me some; she gave me a shilling, and with that I bought as much gunpowder as I could procure, more than a quarter of a pound.

I then returned to the school, looked into the school-room, and found it empty; I quickly raised up the claret case, under which the fireworks had been placed, put the powder under it, leaving only sufficient for a very small train, which would not be perceived in the green baize covering; having so done, I left the school-room immediately, and rejoined my companions. I had a piece of touch-wood, as all the boys had, to let off their fireworks with, and this I lighted and left in a corner until the bell should summons us into school.

Oh! how my heart beat when I heard the sound, so full was I of anxiety lest my project should fail.

Once more we were all assembled. Mr O’Gallagher surveying, with the smile of a demon, the unhappy and disappointed faces of the boys, was again perched upon his throne, the rod on one side, the ferrule on the other, and the ruler, that dreaded truncheon of command, clenched in his broad fist.

I had the touchwood lighted and concealed in my hand; gradually I moved downwards, until at last, unperceived by Mr O’Gallagher, I was behind him, and close to my train of gunpowder. I gave one look to ascertain if he had observed me; his eye was roving over the school for some delinquent to throw his ruler at; fearful that he might turn round to me, I no longer hesitated, and the touchwood was applied to the train.

Ignorant as I was of the force of gunpowder, it was with astonishment, mingled with horror, that I beheld, in a second, the claret case rise up as if it had wings, and Mr O’Gallagher thrown up to the ceiling enveloped in a cloud of smoke, the crackers and squibs fizzing and banging, while the boys in the school uttered a yell of consternation and fear as they rushed from from the explosion, and afterwards, tumbling over one another, made their escape from the school-room.

The windows had all been blown out with a terrible crash, and the whole school-room was now covered by the smoke. There I stood in silent dismay at the mischief which I had done. The squibs and crackers had not, however, all finished popping, before I heard the howling of Mr O’Gallagher, who had fallen down upon the centre school-room table.

I was still in the school-room, half-suffocated, yet not moving away from where I stood, when the neighbours, who had been alarmed by the explosion and the cries of the boys, rushed in, and perceiving only me and Mr O’Gallagher, who still howled, they caught hold of us both, and bore us out in their arms. It was high time, for the school-room was now on fire, and in a few minutes more the flames burst out of the windows, while volumes of smoke forced through the door and soon afterwards the roof.

The engines were sent for, but before they could arrive, or water be procured, the whole tenement was so enveloped in flames that it could not be saved. In an hour, the *locale* of our misery was reduced to ashes. They had put me on my legs as soon as we got clear of the school-room, to ascertain whether I was hurt, and finding that I was not, they left me.

I never shall forget what my sensations were, when I beheld the flames and volumes of smoke bursting out; the hurry, and bustle, and confusion outside; the working of the engines, the troops marched up from the barracks, the crowd of people assembled, and the ceaseless mingling of tongues from every quarter; and all this is my doing, thought I—mine—all mine.

I felt delighted that I had no partner or confederate; I could, at all events, keep my own secret. I did, however, feel some anxiety as to Mr O’Gallagher, for, much as I detested him, I certainly had no intention to kill him; so after a time, I made inquiries, and found that he was alive: and in no danger, although very much bruised and somewhat burnt.

No one could explain how the catastrophe occurred, further than that Mr O’Gallagher had collected all the squibs and crackers from the boys, and that they had exploded somehow or another—most people said that it served him right. My grandmother shook her head and said, “Yes, yes, gunpowder will go off, but—” and she looked at me—“it requires a match to be put to it.” I looked up very innocently, but made no reply.

Mr O’Gallagher’s favourite expression, to wit, “that it would end in a blow-up,” proved, as far as his school was concerned, literally true. He had not the means of procuring another suitable tenement in Chatham, and as soon as he had recovered from the injuries he had received, he quitted the town.

It was not until he had left, that I ventured to make known to Captain Bridgeman, and my aunt Milly, the trifling share I had in the transaction; and they, perceiving the prudence of keeping my secret, desired me on no account to let it be known to any one else.

Chapter Nine

As soon as it was ascertained that Mr O’Gallagher was gone, my grandmother insisted upon my being sent to another school, and on this occasion my mother made the inquiries herself, and I was despatched to one much nearer home, and being treated well, not only played fewer tricks, but advanced rapidly in my education; so rapidly indeed, that my grandmother began to think that I was not so bad a boy as I used to be.

As she treated me more kindly, I felt less inclined to tease her although the spirit of mischief was as undiminished as ever, and was shown in various ways.

I may as well here observe, that out of the many admirers of my aunt Milly, there were only two who appeared to be at all constant in their attention. One was Lieutenant Flat, who was positively smitten, and would have laid his pay and person at her feet, had he received anything like encouragement; but my aunt disliked him in the first place, and, moreover, had a very strong feeling towards Captain Bridgeman.

Mr Flat was certainly a very fine-looking soldier, being tall, erect, and well-made, but he was at the same time not over-brilliant; he was, as an officer, the very sort of person my father Ben was as a private.

But the other party, Captain Bridgeman, did not come forward; he appeared to be in doubt, and not at all able to make up his mind.

The fact was, that my mother being married to a private, made any match with the sister objectionable to the whole corps, as it would be derogatory that one sister should be the wife of a private, and the other of an officer. Ben would have been able to say, “My brother-in-law, the captain of my division,” which would never have done; and this Captain Bridgeman felt, and therefore resisted, as well as he could, the inroads which my aunt’s beauty and mirth had made into his heart. My aunt was exactly a person to suit Captain Bridgeman as a helpmate, had it not been for this unfortunate alliance of my mother’s.

Lieutenant Flat was too stupid and indifferent to the opinion of the other officers, to care anything about what they thought; he would have married Milly long before, but my aunt, who had made up her mind to marry an officer, did not yet despair of obtaining the captain; and although she would not positively dismiss Lieutenant Flat, she merely kept him as a sort of reserve, to fall back upon when every other chance was gone.

I should like, if I possibly could, to give the reader some idea of my mother’s circulating-library and sort of universal commodity shop: it was a low-windowed building, one story high, but running a long way back, where it was joined to a small parlour, in which we generally sat during the day, as it was convenient in case of company or customers, the little parlour having a glass door, which permitted us to look into the shop.

In the front windows, on one side, were all the varieties of tapers, sealing-wax, inkstands, and every kind of stationery, backed by children’s books, leather writing-cases, prints, caricatures, and Tonbridge ware. In the other windows were ribbons, caps, gloves, scarfs, needles, and other little articles in demand by ladies, and which they required independent of their milliners.

At the entrance were sticks and canes; on the counter a case of gold and more moderate-priced trinkets. On the shelves of the millinery side were boxes of gloves, ribbons, buttons, etcetera. On the opposite side, perfumes, cigars, toothbrushes, combs, scented soaps, and other requisites for the toilet.

About ten feet on each side of the shop was occupied with the above articles; the remainder of the shelves were reserved for the circulating-library.

At the back of the shop were some seats round a small table, on which was laid the newspaper of the day, and on each side of the parlour-door were hoops, bats, balls, traps, skittles, and a variety of toys for children.

My mother usually attended to the millinery, and my aunt Milly to what might be termed the gentlemen's side of the shop; the remainder of the goods and circulating-library were in the hands of both.

There were few hours of the day in which the chairs at the counter and round the table were not taken possession of by some one or another, either reading the paper or a book, or talking, to pass away the time. In fact, it was a sort of rendezvous, where all who met knew each other, and where the idle of our own sex used to repair to get rid of their time. Captain Bridgeman and Mr Flat were certainly the two most constantly to be found there, although few of the marine officers were a day without paying us a visit.

Such was the *locale*; to describe the company will be more difficult, but I will attempt it.

My mother, remarkably nicely dressed, is busy opening a parcel of new books just arrived. My aunt Milly behind the counter, on the gentlemen's side, pretending to be working upon a piece of muslin about five inches square. Mr Flat sitting near the table, fallen back in his chair, apparently watching the flies on the ceiling. Captain Bridgeman, a very good-looking man, very slight, but extremely active, is sitting at the counter opposite to where my aunt is standing, a small black cane, with a silver head to it, in his hand, and his gloves peculiarly clean and well-fitting. He has an eye as sharp as an eagle's, a slight hook to his nose, thin lips, and very white teeth; his countenance is as full of energy and fire as that of lieutenant Flat is heavy and unmeaning.

"Miss Amelia, if I may take the liberty," said Captain Bridgeman, pointing with his cane to the bit of muslin she is employed upon; "what are you making? it's too small for any part of a lady's dress."

"It is quite large enough for a cuff, Captain Bridgeman."

"A cuff; then you are making a cuff, I presume?"

"Indeed she is not, Captain Bridgeman," replies my mother; "it is only to keep herself out of mischief. She spoils a bit like that every week. And that's why it is so small, Captain Bridgeman; it would be a pity to spoil a larger piece."

"I really was not aware that such a mere trifle would keep you out of mischief," said the captain.

"You know," replied Aunt Milly, "that idleness is the root of all evil, Captain Bridgeman."

"Flat, do you hear that?" says Captain Bridgeman.

"What?" replies Flat.

"That idleness is the root of all evil; what an evil-disposed person you must be."

"I was thinking," replied Flat.

"I suspect it's only lately you've taken to that. Who or what were you thinking about?"

"Well, I believe I was thinking how long it would be before dinner was ready."

"That's very rude, Mr Flat; you might have said that you were thinking about me," replied my aunt.

"Well, so I was at first, and then I began to think of dinner-time."

"Don't be offended, Miss Amelia; Flat pays you a great compliment in dividing his attentions; but I really wish to know why ladies will spoil muslin in such a predetermined manner. Will you explain that, Mrs Keene?"

"Yes, Captain Bridgeman: a piece of work is very valuable to a woman, especially when she finds herself in company with gentlemen like you. It saves her from looking down, or looking at you, when you are talking nonsense; it prevents your reading in her eyes what is passing in her mind, or discovering what effect your words may have upon her; it saves much awkwardness, and very often a blush; sometimes a woman hardly knows which way to look; sometimes she may look any way but the right. Now a bit of muslin with a needle is a remedy for all that, for she can look down at her work, and not look up till she thinks it advisable."

"I thank you for your explanation, madam; I shall always take it as a great compliment if I see a lady very busy at work when I'm conversing, with her."

“But you may flatter yourself, Captain Bridgeman,” replied my mother; “the attention to her work may arise from perfect indifference, or from positive annoyance. It saves the trouble of making an effort to be polite.”

“And pray, may I inquire, Miss Amelia, what feeling may cause your particular attention to your work at this present moment?”

“Perhaps in either case to preserve my self-possession,” replied Amelia; “or perhaps, Captain Bridgeman, I may prefer looking at a piece of muslin to looking at a marine officer.”

“That’s not very flattering,” replied the captain; “if you spoil the muslin, you’re determined not to spoil me.”

“The muslin is of little value,” said Amelia, softly, walking to the other side of the shop, and turning over the books.

“Mr Flat,” said my mother, “your subscription to the library is out last month; I presume I can put your name down again?”

“Well, I don’t know; I never read a book,” replied Mr Flat, yawning.

“That’s not at all necessary, Mr Flat,” said my mother; “in most businesses there are sleeping partners; besides, if you don’t read, you come here to talk, which is a greater enjoyment still, and luxuries must be paid for.”

“Well, I’ll try another quarter,” replied Mr Flat, “and then—”

“And then what?” said my aunt Milly, smiling.

“Well, I don’t know,” says Flat. “Is that clock of yours right, Mrs Keene?”

“It is; but I am fearful that your thoughts run faster than the clock, Mr Flat; you are thinking of the dress-bugle for dinner.”

“No, I was not.”

“Then you were thinking of yourself?”

“No, I wasn’t, Mrs Keene,” said Flat, rising, and walking out of the shop.

“I’ll tell you,” said he, turning round as he went out, “what I was thinking of, Mrs Keene; not of myself,—I was thinking of my bull pup.”

My mother burst out a laughing as the lieutenant disappeared. “I was not far wrong when I said he was thinking of himself,” said she, “for a *calf* is a sort of *bull pup*.”

At this sally Captain Bridgeman laughed, and danced about the shop; at last he said, “Poor Flat! Miss Amelia, he’s desperately in love with you.”

“That’s more than I am with him,” said Amelia, calmly.

Here two ladies came in.

Captain Bridgeman made a most polite bow. “I trust Mrs Handbell is quite well and Miss Handbell—I hardly need ask the question with the charming colour you have?”

“Captain Bridgeman, you appear to live in this library; I wonder Mrs Keene don’t take you into partnership.”

“If I were not honoured with the custom of Mrs Handbell and other ladies; I fear that my shop would have little attraction for gentlemen,” replied my mother, with a courtesy.

“Mrs Keene is quite correct in her surmise, Miss Handbell,” said Captain Bridgeman, “now that I have seen you, I shall not think my morning thrown away.”

“If report says true, Captain Bridgeman,” replied Mrs Handbell, “you would be quite as often here, even if no ladies were to be customers of Mrs Keene. Mrs Keene, have you any of that narrow French ribbon left?”

“I think I have, madam; it was off this piece, was it not?”

“Yes; but I really don’t know exactly how much I require; perhaps you will measure it and allow me to return what is left?”

“Certainly, madam; will you take it with you, or shall I send it?”

“I wish for it directly; will you be very long in measuring it, for I ought to be home now?”

“Perhaps you’ll have the kindness to measure what you take off yourself, madam,” replied my mother, “and then you need not wait.”

“You put confidence in me, I observe, Mrs Keene,” replied Mrs Handbell; “well, I will do you justice.”

My mother smiled most graciously, put the piece of ribbon in paper, and handed it to Mrs Handbell, who, bowing to Captain Bridgeman, quitted the shop.

“I wonder whether you would trust me in that way?” said Captain Bridgeman to my mother.

“I don’t think I should; Amelia says you will help yourself to cigars and that she is sure you cheat when you count them.”

“Does she really say that? Well, I did think that if there was any one who would have upheld my character, it would have been Miss Amelia.”

“Perhaps, Captain Bridgeman, she is getting tired of so doing.”

“Or tired of me, Mrs Keene, which would be worse still. Here comes a fair young lady—Miss Evans, if I mistake not; I believe she is a good customer to your library?”

“She reads a great deal, and is therefore only a customer to the library.”

“Ladies who are fond of reading are seldom fond of working.”

“Good morning Miss Evans,” said Captain Bridgeman; “you come for more food for the mind, I presume?” (Miss Evans gave a bob, and turned to my mother.)

“Have you anything new, Mrs Keene? I have brought back the three volumes of Godolphin.”

“Yes, miss, I have some books down to-day.”

While Miss Evans was selecting from the new books, enter Mr Jones, Mr Smith, and Mr Claville, of the marine corps, for cigars. Amelia comes out to attend them—they purchase a few articles, and are talking very loud, when three more ladies enter the shop, all for books.

It being now about three o’clock, the customers and loungers come in fast. Captain Bridgeman saunters away in company with his brother officers; other parties enter, who are succeeded by fresh claimants for books or the other articles to be procured in the repository.

This demand continues till about five o’clock, when the library becomes empty; I come home from school, my father slinks in from barracks, and my mother and sister return to the back parlour, where they find my grandmother, as usual, very busy with her knitting.

Such is a fair sample of what took place at our shop every succeeding day. My mother made few bad debts, and rapidly added to her savings. My aunt Milly still balancing between the certainty of Lieutenant Flat and the chance of Captain Bridgeman, and I dividing my time and talents between learning and contriving mischief.

Chapter Ten

About six months after I had blown up the school of Mr O'Gallagher, the company to which my father Ben belonged was ordered afloat again, and shortly afterwards sailed for the East Indies, in the Redoubtable, 74. That my mother was very much pleased at his departure, I do not scruple to assert; but whether she ever analysed her feelings, I cannot pretend to say; I rather think that all she wished was, that the chapter of accidents would prevent Ben's reappearance, as she was ashamed of him as a husband, and felt that he was an obstacle to her sister's advancement.

So one fine day Ben wished us all good bye; my mother was very generous to him, as she could well afford to be. I rather think that Ben himself was not sorry to go, for, stupid as he was, he must have felt what a cypher he had become, being treated, not only by my mother, but by everybody else, even by me, as a sort of upper servant.

It so happened, that about a month after Ben's departure, Captain Delmar had, through the interest of his uncle, Lord de Versely, been appointed to a ship which was lying in the Medway, and he came down to Chatham to join her. He had no idea that my mother was there, for he had lost sight of her altogether, and had it not been for me, might very probably have left the town without having made the discovery.

Among other amusements, I had a great partiality for a certain bull pup, mentioned by Lieutenant Flat in the former chapter, and which he had made me a present of; the pup was now grown up, and I had taught it many tricks; but the one which afforded me most amusement (of course, at other people's expense) was, that I had made out of oakum a sham pigtail, about a foot and a half long, very strong and thick, with an iron hook at the upper end of it.

The sham tail I could easily hook on to the collar of any one's coat from behind, without their perceiving it; and Bob had been instructed by me, whenever I told him to fetch it (and not before), to jump up at the tail wherever it might be, and hang on to it with all the tenacity of the race.

As it may be supposed, this was a great source of mirth in the barracks; it was considered a good joke, and was much applauded by Captain Bridgeman; but it was not considered a good joke out of the barracks; and many an old woman had I already frightened almost out of her senses, by affixing the tail to any portion of the back part of her dress.

It so happened, that one afternoon, as I was cruising about with Bob at my heels, I perceived the newly-arrived Captain Delmar, in all the pomp of pride of full uniform, parading down the street with a little midddy at his heels; and I thought to myself, "Law! how I should like to hang my tail to his fine coat, if I only dared;" the impulse had become so strong, that I actually had pulled up my pinafore and disengaged the tail ready for any opportunity, but I was afraid that the midddy would see me.

Captain Delmar had passed close to me, the midddy at his heels was passing, and I thought all chance was gone, when, suddenly, Captain Delmar turned short round and addressed the little officer, asking him whether he had brought the order-book with him? The midddy touched his hat, and said, "No;" upon which Captain Delmar began to inflict a most serious lecture upon the lad for forgetting what he had forgotten himself, and I again passed by.

This was an opportunity I could not resist; while the captain and midddy were so well employed giving and receiving I fixed my oakum tail to the collar of the Captain's gold-laced coat, and then walked over to the other side of the street with Bob at my heels.

The midddy being duly admonished, Captain Delmar turned round again and resumed his way; upon which I called Bob, who was quite as ready for the fun as I was, and pointing to the captain, said, "Fetch it, Bob." My companion cleared the street in three or four bounds, and in a few seconds afterwards made a spring up the back of Captain Delmar, and seizing the tail, hung by it with his teeth, shaking it with all his might as he hung in the air.

Captain Delmar was, to use a sailor's term, completely taken aback; indeed he was nearly capsized by the unexpected assault. For a short time he could not discover what it was; at last, by turning his head over his shoulder and putting his hand behind him, he discovered who his assailant was.

Just at that time, I called out "Mad dog! mad dog!" and Captain Delmar, hearing those alarming words, became dreadfully frightened; his cocked hat dropped from his head, and he took to his heels as fast as he could, running down the street, with Bob clinging behind him.

The first open door he perceived was that of my mother's library; he burst in, nearly upsetting Captain Bridgeman, who was seated at the counter, talking to Aunt Milly, crying out "Help! help!" As he turned round, his sword became entangled between his legs, tripped him up, and he fell on the floor. This unhooked the tail, and Bob galloped out of the shop, bearing his prize to me, who, with the little middy, remained in the street convulsed with laughter. Bob delivered up the tail, which I again concealed under my pinafore, and then with a demure face ventured to walk towards my mother's house, and, going in at the back door, put Master Bob in the wash-house out of the way; the little middy who had picked up the captain's hat, giving me a wink as I passed him, as much as to say, I won't inform against you.

In the meantime Captain Delmar had been assisted to his legs by Captain Bridgeman, who well knew who had played the trick, and who, as well as Aunt Milly, had great difficulty in controlling his mirth.

"Merciful heaven! what was it? Was the animal mad? Has it bitten me?" exclaimed Captain Delmar, falling back in his chair, in which he had been seated by Captain Bridgeman.

"I really do not know," replied Captain Bridgeman; "but you are not hurt, sir, apparently, nor indeed is your coat torn."

"What dog—whose dog can it be?—it must be shot immediately—I shall give orders—I shall report the case to the admiral. May I ask for a glass of water? Oh, Mr Dott! you're there, sir; how came you to allow that dog to fasten himself on my back in that way?"

"If you please," said the middy, presenting his cocked hat to the captain, "I did draw my dirk to kill him, but you ran away so fast that I couldn't catch you."

"Very well, sir, you may go down to the boat and wait for orders," replied the captain.

At this moment my mother, who had been dressing herself, made her first appearance, coming out of the back parlour with a glass of water, which aunt Milly had gone in for. Perceiving a gold-laced captain, she advanced all smiles and courtesies, until she looked in his face, and then she gave a scream, and dropped the tumbler on the floor, much to the surprise of Captain Bridgeman, and also of aunt Milly, who, not having been at the Hall, was not acquainted with the person of Captain Delmar.

Just at this moment in came I, looking as demure as if, as the saying is, "butter would not melt in my mouth," and certainly as much astonished as the rest at my mother's embarrassment; but she soon recovered herself, and asked Captain Delmar if he would condescend to repose himself a little in the back parlour. When my mother let the tumbler fall, the captain had looked her full in the face and recognised her, and, in a low voice, said, "Excessively strange,—so very unexpected!" He then rose up from the chair and followed my mother into the back room.

"Who can it be?" said Aunt Milly to Captain Bridgeman, in a low tone.

"I suppose it must be the new captain appointed to the Calliope. I read his name in the papers,—the Honourable Captain Delmar."

"It must be him," replied Milly; "for my sister was brought up by his aunt, Mrs Delmar; no wonder she was surprised at meeting him so suddenly. Percival, you naughty boy," continued Milly, shaking her finger at me, "it was all your doing."

"Oh, Aunt Milly! you should have seen him run," replied I, laughing at the thought.

"I'd recommend you not to play with post captains," said Captain Bridgeman, "or you may get worse than you give. Mercy on us!" exclaimed he, looking at me full in the face.

“What’s the matter?” said aunt Milly.

Captain Bridgeman leant over the counter, and I heard him whisper, “Did you ever see such a likeness as between the lad and Captain Delmar?”

Milly blushed a little, nodded her head, and smiled, as she turned away. Captain Bridgeman appeared to be afterwards in a brown study; he tapped his boot with his cane, and did not speak.

About a quarter of an hour passed, during which Captain Delmar remained with my mother in the parlour, when she opened the door, and beckoned me to come in. I did so not without some degree of anxiety, for I was afraid that I had been discovered: but this doubt was soon removed; Captain Delmar did me the honour to shake hands with me, and then patted my head saying, he hoped I was a good boy, which, being compelled to be my own trumpeter, I very modestly declared that I was. My mother, who was standing up behind, lifted up her eyes at my barefaced assertion. Captain Delmar then shook hands with my mother, intimating his intention of paying her another visit very soon, and again patting me on the head, quitted the parlour, and went away through the shop.

As soon as Captain Delmar was gone, my mother turned round, and said, “You naughty, mischievous boy, to play such pranks. I’ll have that dog killed, without you promise me never to do so again.”

“Do what again, mother?”

“None of your pretended innocence with me. I’ve been told of the pigtail that Bob pulls at. That’s all very well at the barracks with the marines, sir, but do you know *who* it is that you have been playing that trick to?”

“No mother, I don’t. Who is he?”

“Who is he, you undutiful child? why, he’s—he’s the Honourable Captain Delmar.”

“Well, what of that?” replied I. “He’s a naval captain, ain’t he?”

“Yes; but he’s the nephew of the lady who brought me up and educated me. It was he that made the match between me and our father: so if it had not been for him, child, you never would have been born.”

“Oh that’s it,” replied I. “Well, mother, if it had not been for me, he’d never have come into the shop, and found you.”

“But, my child, we must be serious; you must be very respectful to Captain Delmar, and play no tricks with him; for you may see him very often, and, perhaps, he will take a fancy to you; and if he does, he may do you a great deal of good, and bring you forward in the world; so promise me.”

“Well, mother, I’ll promise you I’ll leave him alone if you wish it. Law, mother, you should have seen how the middy laughed at him; it was real fun to make a gallant captain run in the way he did.”

“Go along, you mischievous animal, and recollect your promise to me,” said my mother, as she went into the shop where she found that Captain Bridgeman, to whom she intended to explain how it was that she had dropped the tumbler of water, had gone away.

There was a great deal of consultation between my grandmother and my mother on that evening; my aunt and I were sent out to take a walk, that we might not overhear what passed, and when we returned we found them still in close conversation.

Chapter Eleven

The Honourable Captain Delmar was now a frequent visitor to my mother, and a good customer to the library. He did, however, generally contrive that his visit should be paid late in the afternoon, just after the marine officers had retired to dress for dinner; for he was a very haughty personage, and did not think it proper for any officers of an inferior grade to come “between the wind and his nobility.”

I cannot say that I was partial to him; indeed, his pomposity, as I considered it, was to me a source of ridicule and dislike. He took more notice of me than he did of anybody else; but he appeared to consider that his condescending patronage was all that was necessary; whereas, had he occasionally given me a half-crown I should have cherished better feelings towards him: not that I wanted money, for my mother supplied me very liberally, considering my age: but although you may coax and flatter a girl into loving you, you cannot a boy, who requires more substantial proofs of your good-will.

There were a great many remarks not very flattering to my mother, made behind her back, as to her former intimacy with Captain Delmar; for, somehow or another, there always is somebody who knows something, wherever doubts or surmises arise, and so it was in this case; but if people indulged in ill-natured remarks when she was not there, they did not in her presence; on the contrary, the friendship of so great a man as the Honourable Captain Delmar appeared rather to make my mother a person of more consequence.

She was continually pointing out to me the propriety of securing the good will of this great personage, and the more she did so, the more I felt inclined to do the reverse; indeed, I should have broke out into open mutiny, if it had not been for Captain Bridgeman, who sided with my mother, and when I went to him to propose playing another trick upon the noble captain, not only refused to aid me, but told me, if I ever thought of such a thing, he would never allow me to come to his rooms again.

“Why, what good can he do to me?” inquired I.

“He may advance you properly in life—who knows?—he may put you on the quarter-deck, and get you promoted in the service.”

“What, make a middy of me?”

“Yes, and from a midshipman you may rise to be a post-captain, or admiral,—a much greater rank than I shall ever obtain,” said Captain Bridgeman; “so take my advice, and do as your mother wishes; be very civil and respectful to Captain Delmar, and he may be as good as a father to you.”

“That’s not saying much,” replied I, thinking of my father Ben; “I’d rather have two mothers than two fathers.” And here the conversation ended.

I had contracted a great alliance with Mr Dott, the midshipman, who followed Captain Delmar about, just as Bob used to follow me, and generally remained in the shop or outside with me, when his captain called upon my mother. He was a little wag, as full of mischief as myself, and even his awe of his captain, which, as a youngster in the service, was excessive, would not prevent him from occasionally breaking out. My mother took great notice of him, and when he could obtain leave (which, indeed, she often asked for him), invited him to come to our house, when he became my companion during his stay; we would sally out together, and vie with each other in producing confusion and mirth at other people’s expense; we became the abhorrence of every old fruit-woman and beggar in the vicinity.

Captain Delmar heard occasionally of my pranks, and looked very majestic and severe; but as I was not a middy, I cared little for his frowns. At last an opportunity offered which I could not resist; and, not daring to make known my scheme either to Captain Bridgeman or Aunt Milly, I confided it to Tommy Dott, the little middy, who, regardless of the consequences, joined me in it heart and soul.

The theatre had been opened at Chatham, and had met with indifferent success. I went there once with my aunt Milly, and twice with Mr Dott; I, therefore, knew my *locale* well. It appeared that

one of the female performers, whose benefit was shortly to take place, was very anxious to obtain the patronage of Captain Delmar, and, with the usual tact of women, had applied to my mother in the most obsequious manner, requesting her to espouse her cause with the gallant captain.

My mother, pleased with the idea of becoming, as it were, a patroness under the rose, did so effectually exert her influence over the captain, that, in a day or two afterwards, play-bills were posted all over the town, announcing that the play of *The Stranger*, with the farce of *Raising the Wind*, would be performed on Friday evening, for the benefit of Miss Mortimer under the patronage of the Honourable Captain Delmar, and the officers of his Majesty's ship *Calliope*. Of course the grateful young lady sent my mother some tickets of admission, and two of them I reserved for Tommy Dott and myself.

Captain Delmar had made a large party of ladies, and of course all the officers of the ship attended: the house was as full as it could hold. My mother and aunt were there in a retired part of the boxes; Tommy Dott and I entered the theatre with them, and afterwards had gone up to what is, at the theatres at seaports, usually denominated the slips, that is, the sides of the theatre on the same range as the gallery. There was Captain Delmar with all his ladies and all his officers, occupying nearly the whole of the side of the dress circle below us, we having taken our position above him, so that we might not be observed.

The performance commenced. Miss Mortimer, as *Mrs Haller*, was very effective; and in the last scene was compelling the eyes of the company to water, when we thought we would produce a still greater effect.

We had purchased a pound of the finest Scotch snuff, which we had enclosed in two pasteboard cases, similar in form to those of squibs, only about six times the size, and holding half a pound of snuff each. Our object was, in doing this, that, by jerking it all out with a heave, we might at once throw it right into the centre of the theatre above, so that in its descent it might be fairly distributed among all parties.

There was no one in the slips with us, except midshipmen, and a description of people who would consider it a good joke, and never would peach if they perceived we were the culprits.

At a signal between us, just as *Mrs Haller* was giving a paper to her husband did we give our shower of snuff to the audience, jerking it right across the theatre. In a few minutes the effect was prodigious; Captain Delmar's party being right beneath us, probably received a greater share, for they commenced sneezing fast, then the boxes on the other side, the pit followed, and at last *Mr and Mrs Haller* and the *Stranger* were taken with such a fit of sneezing that they could no longer talk to each other.

The children were brought out to their parents to effect their reconciliation, but they did nothing but sneeze, poor things; and at last the uproar was tremendous, and the curtain was dropped, not to loud plaudits, but to loud sneezings from every part of the theatre.

Never was there anything so ludicrous; the manager sent officers up to discover the offenders but no one could tell who had played the trick; he then came before the curtain to make a speech upon the occasion, but, having sneezed seven or eight times, he was obliged to retire with his handkerchief to his nose; and the audience, finding it impossible to check the titillation of the olfactory nerves, abandoned the theatre as fast as they could, leaving the farce of *Raising the Wind* to be performed to empty beaches.

I hardly need say, that as soon as we had thrown the snuff, Mr Dott and I had gone down and taken our places very demurely in the box by the side of my mother, and appeared just as astonished, and indeed added as much as possible to the company of sneezers.

Captain Delmar was very furious at this want of respect of certain parties unknown, and had we been discovered, whatever might have been my fate, it would have gone hard with Tommy Dott; but we kept our own counsel, and escaped.

That I was suspected by Aunt Milly and Captain Bridgeman is certain, and my aunt taxed me with it, but I would not confess; my mother also had her suspicions, but as Captain Delmar had none, that was of no consequence.

The success of this trick was a great temptation to try another or two upon the noble captain. He was, however saved by the simple fact of H.M. ship Calliope being reported manned and ready for sea; orders were sent down for his going round to Portsmouth to await the commands of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, and Captain Delmar came to pay his farewell visit.

The report from the schoolmaster had been very favourable and Captain Delmar then asked me, for the first time, if I would like to be a sailor. As Captain Bridgeman had advised me not to reject any good offer on the part of the honourable captain, I answered in the affirmative; whereupon the captain replied, that if I paid attention to my learning, in a year's time he would take me with him on board of his frigate.

He then patted my head, forgot to give me half a crown, and, shaking hands with my mother and aunt, quitted the house, followed by Tommy Dott, who, as he went away, turned and laughed his adieu.

I have not mentioned my grandmother lately. The fact is, that when Captain Delmar made his appearance, for some cause or another, which I could not comprehend, she declared her intention of going away and paying a visit to her old acquaintances at the Hall. She did so. As I afterwards found out from what I overheard, she had a very great aversion to the noble captain: but the cause of her aversion was never communicated to me. Soon after the sailing of the Calliope, she again made her appearance, took her old seat in the easy-chair, and resumed her eternal knitting as before.

Chapter Twelve

Another year of my existence passed rapidly away; I was nearly thirteen years old, a sturdy bold boy, well fitted for the naval profession, which I now considered decided upon, and began to be impatient to leave school, and wondered that we heard nothing of Captain Delmar, when news was received from another quarter.

One morning Captain Bridgeman came much earlier than usual, and with a very grave face put on especially for the occasion. I had not set off for school, and ran up to him; but he checked me, and said, "I must see your mother directly, I have very important news for her."

I went in to tell my mother, who requested Captain Bridgeman to come into the parlour, and not being aware of the nature of the communication, ordered Aunt Milly and me into the shop; we waited for some minutes, and then Captain Bridgeman made his appearance.

"What is the matter?" said Milly.

"Read this newspaper," said he; "there is a despatch from India, it will tell you all about it, and you can show it to your sister, when she is more composed."

Curious to know what the matter could be, I quitted the shop, and went into the parlour, where I saw my mother with her face buried in the sofa pillow, and apparently in great distress.

"What's the matter, mother?" said I.

"Oh! my child, my child!" replied my mother, wringing her hands, "you are an orphan, and I am a lonely widow."

"How's that?" said I.

"How's that?" said my grandmother, "why, are you such a fool, as not to understand that your father is dead?"

"Father's dead, is he?" replied I, "I'll go and tell Aunt Milly;" and away I went out of the parlour to Milly, whom I found reading the newspaper.

"Aunt," said I, "father's dead, only to think! I wonder how he died!"

"He was killed in action, dear," said my aunt; "look here, here is the account, and the list of killed and wounded. D'ye see your father's name—Benjamin Keene, marine?"

"Let me read all about it, Aunt Milly," replied I, taking the paper from her; and I was soon very busy with the account of the action.

My readers must not suppose that I had no feeling, because I showed none at my father's death; if they call to mind the humble position in which I had always seen my father, who dared not even intrude upon the presence of those with whom my mother and I were on familiar terms, and that he was ordered about just like a servant by my mother, who set me no example of fear or love for him, they will easily imagine that I felt less for his death than I should have for that of Captain Bridgeman, or many others with whom I was on intimate terms.

What did puzzle me was, that my mother should show so much feeling on the occasion. I did not know the world then, and that decency required a certain display of grief. Aunt Milly appeared to be very unconcerned about it, although, occasionally, she was in deep thought. I put down the paper as soon as I had read the despatch, and said to her, "Well, I suppose I must go to school now, aunt?"

"Oh no, dear," replied she, "you can't go to school for a few days now—it wouldn't be proper; you must remain at home and wait till you have put on mourning."

"I'm glad of that, at all events," replied I; "I wonder where Captain Delmar is, and why he don't send for me; I begin to hate school."

"I dare say it won't be long before you hear from him, dear," replied my aunt; "stay here and mind the shop, while I go in to your mother."

If the truth was told, I am afraid that the death of Ben was a source of congratulation to all parties who were then in the parlour. As for me, I was very glad to have a few days' holiday, being perfectly indifferent as to whether he was dead or alive.

When I went in I found them in consultation as to the mourning: my mother did not, in the first place, wish to make any a parade about a husband of whom she was ashamed; in the second, she did not like widow's weeds, and the unbecoming cap. So it was decided, as Ben had been dead six months, and if they had known it before they would have been in mourning for him all that time, that half-mourning was all that was requisite for them; and that, as for me, there was no reason for my going into mourning at all.

Three days after the intelligence, my mother re-appeared in the shop; the reason why she did not appear before was, that her dress was not ready—she looked very pretty indeed in half-mourning, so did my Aunt Milly; and the attentions of the marine corps, especially Captain Bridgeman and Lieutenant Flat, were more unremitting than ever.

It appeared that, as the death of Ben had removed the great difficulty to my aunt's being married to an officer, my grandmother had resolved to ascertain the intentions of Captain Bridgeman, and if she found that he cried off, to persuade Milly to consent to become Mrs Flat. Whether she consulted my mother or my aunt on this occasion, I cannot positively say, but I rather think not.

My mother and my aunt were walking out one evening, when Captain Bridgeman came in, and my grandmother, who remained in the shop whenever my mother and Milly went out together, which was very seldom, requested him to walk into the back parlour, desiring me to remain in the shop, and let her know if she was wanted.

Now when they went into the parlour, the door was left ajar, and, as I remained at the back part of the shop, I could not help over-hearing every word which was said; for my grandmother being very deaf, as most deaf people do, talked quite as loud as Captain Bridgeman was compelled to do, to make her hear him.

"I wish, Captain Bridgeman, as a friend, to ask your advice relative to my daughter Amelia," said the old lady. "Please to take a chair."

"If there is any opinion that I can offer on the subject, madam, I shall be most happy to give it," replied the captain, sitting down as requested.

"You see, my daughter Amelia has been well brought up, and carefully educated, as was, indeed, my daughter, Arabella, through the kindness of my old patron, Mrs Delmar, the aunt of the Honourable Captain Delmar, whom you have often met here, and who is heir to the title of de Versely; that is to say, his eldest brother has no children. I have been nearly fifty years in the family as a confidential, Captain Bridgeman; the old lord was very fond of my husband, who was his steward, but he died, poor man, a long while ago; I am sure it would have broken his heart, if, in his lifetime, my daughter Arabella had made the foolish marriage which she did with a private marine—however, what's done can't be helped, as the saying is—that's all over now."

"It was certainly a great pity that Mrs Keene should have been so foolish," replied Captain Bridgeman, "but, as you say, that is all over now."

"Yes; God's will be done, Captain Bridgeman; now you see, sir, that this marriage of Bella's has done no good to the prospects of her sister Amelia, who, nevertheless, is a good and pretty girl though I say it, who am her mother; and moreover, she will bring a pretty penny to her husband whoever he may be; for you see, Captain Bridgeman, my husband was not idle during the time that he was in the family of the Delmars, and as her sister is so well to do, why little Amelia will come into a greater share than she otherwise would—that is, if she marries well, and according to the wishes of her mother."

At this interesting part of the conversation Captain Bridgeman leant more earnestly towards my grandmother.

“A pretty penny, madam, you said; I never heard the expression before; what may a pretty penny mean?”

“It means, first and last, 4,000 pounds, Captain Bridgeman; part down, and the other when I die.”

“Indeed,” replied Captain Bridgeman; “I certainly never thought that Miss Amelia would ever have any fortune; indeed, she’s too pretty and accomplished to require any.”

“Now, sir,” continued my grandmother, “the point on which I wish to consult you is this: you know that Lieutenant Flat is very often here, and for a long while has been very attentive to my daughter; he has, I believe, almost as much as proposed—that is, in his sort of way; but my daughter does not seem to care for him. Now, Captain Bridgeman, Mr Flat may not be very clever, but I believe him to be a very worthy young man; still one must be cautious, and what I wish to know before I interfere and persuade my daughter to marry him is, whether you think that Mr Flat is of a disposition which would make the marriage state a happy one; for you see, Captain Bridgeman, love before marriage is very apt to fly away, but love that comes after marriage will last out your life.”

“Well, madam,” replied the captain, “I will be candid with you; I do not think that a clever girl like Miss Amelia is likely to be happy as the wife of my good friend Mr Flat—still there is nothing against his character, madam; I believe him harmless—very harmless.”

“He’s a very fine-looking young man, Captain Bridgeman.”

“Yes; nothing to be found fault with in his appearance.”

“Very good-natured.”

“Yes; he’s not very quick in temper, or anything else; he’s what we call a slow-coach.”

“I hear he’s a very correct officer, Captain Bridgeman.”

“Yes; I am not aware that he has ever been under an arrest.”

“Well, we cannot expect everything in this world; he is handsome, good-tempered, and a good officer—I cannot see why Amelia does not like him, particularly as her affections are not otherwise engaged. I am satisfied with the answer you have given, Captain Bridgeman, and now I shall point out to Amelia that I expect she will make up her mind to accept Mr Flat.”

Here Captain Bridgeman hesitated.

“Indeed, madam, if her affections are not otherwise engaged—I say—are not engaged, madam, I do not think she could do better. Would, you like me to sound Miss Amelia on the subject?”

“Really, Captain Bridgeman, it is very kind of you; you may, perhaps, persuade her to listen to your friend Mr Flat.”

“I will, at all events, ascertain her real sentiments, madam,” said the captain, rising; “and, if you please, I will say farewell for the present.”

As my grandmother anticipated, the scale, which had been so long balanced by Captain Bridgeman, was weighed down in favour of marriage by the death of my father Ben, and the unexpected fortune of 4,000 pounds.

The next day the captain proposed and was accepted, and six weeks from that date my aunt Milly became his wife.

The wedding was very gay: some people did sneer at the match, but where was there ever a match without a sneer? There are always and everywhere people to be found who will envy the happiness of others. Some talked about the private marine; this attack was met with the 4,000 pounds (or rather 8,000 pounds per annum, for rumour, as usual, had doubled the sum); others talked of the shop as *infra dig*; the set-off against which was, the education and beauty of the bride. One or two subs’ wives declared that they would not visit Mrs Bridgeman; but when the colonel and his lady called to congratulate the new-married couple, and invited a large party in their own house to meet them, then then subs’ wives left their cards as soon as they could.

In a few weeks all was right again: my mother would not give up her shop—it was too lucrative; but she was on more intimate terms with her customers; and when people found that, although her

sister was a captain's lady, my mother had too much sense to be ashamed of her position; why they liked her the better. Indeed, as she was still very handsome, one or two of the marine officers, now that she was a widow, paid her very assiduous court; but my mother had no intention of entering again into the holy state—she preferred *State in quo*. She had no one to care for but me, and for me she continued her shop and library, although, I believe, she could have retired upon a comfortable independence, had she chosen so to do.

My mother, whatever she might have been when a girl, was now a strong-minded, clever woman. It must have been a painful thing for her to have made up her mind to allow me to go to sea; I was her only child, her only care; I believe she loved me dearly, although she was not so lavish of her caresses as my aunt Milly; but she perceived that it would be for my advantage that I should insure the patronage and protection of Captain Delmar, and she sacrificed self to my interest.

Chapter Thirteen

About a month after my aunt's marriage, a letter was received from Captain Delmar, who had arrived at Spithead, requesting my mother to send me to Portsmouth as soon as she could, and not go to the trouble or expense of fitting me out, as he would take that upon himself.

This was but short notice to give a fond mother, but there was no help for it; she returned an answer, that in three days from the date of the letter I should be there.

I was immediately summoned from school that she might see as much of me as possible before I went; and although she did not attempt to detain me, I perceived, very often, the tears run down her cheeks.

My grandmother thought proper to make me very long speeches every three or four hours, the substance of which may be comprehended in very few words—to wit, that I had been a very bad boy, and that I was little better now; that I had been spoiled by over-indulgence, and that it was lucky my aunt Milly was not so much with me; that on board a man-of-war I dare not play tricks, and that I would find it very different from being at home with my mother; that Captain Delmar was a very great man, and that I must be very respectful to him; that some day I should thank her very much for her being so kind to me; that she hoped I would behave well, and that if I did not, she hoped that I would get a good beating.

Such was the burden of her song, till at last I got very tired of it, and on the third evening I broke away from her, saying, "Law, granny how you do twaddle!" upon which she called me a good-for-nothing young blackguard, and felt positively sure that I should be hanged. The consequence was, that granny and I did not part good friends; and I sincerely hoped that when I had come back again, I should not find her above ground.

The next morning I bade farewell to my dear Aunt Milly and Captain Bridgeman, received a very ungracious salute from granny, who appeared to think, as she kissed me, that her lips were touching something poisonous, and set off with my mother in the coach to Portsmouth.

We arrived safe at Portsmouth, and my mother immediately took lodgings on the Common Hard at Portsea. The next day, having dressed herself with great care, with a very thick veil on her bonnet, my mother walked with me to the George Hotel, where Captain Delmar had taken up his quarters.

On my mother sending up her card, we were immediately ushered upstairs, and on entering the room found the Honourable Captain Delmar sitting down in full uniform—his sword, and hat, and numerous papers, lying on the table before him. On one side of the table stood a lieutenant, hat in hand; on the other, the captain's clerk, with papers for him to sign. My friend Tommy Dott was standing at the window, chasing a blue-bottle fly, for want of something better to do; and the steward was waiting for orders behind the captain's chair.

My mother, who had pulled down her veil, so that her face was not visible, made a slight courtesy to Captain Delmar, who rose up and advanced to receive her very graciously, requesting that she would be seated for a minute or two, till he had time to speak to her.

I have thought since, that my honourable captain had a mind to impress upon my mother the state and dignity of a captain in his Majesty's service, when in commission. He took no notice whatever of me. Tommy Dott gave me a wink of his eye from the window, and I returned the compliment by putting my tongue into my cheek; but the other parties were too much occupied with the captain to perceive our friendly recognition. Captain Delmar continued to give various orders, and after a time the officers attending were dismissed.

As soon as we were alone, my mother was addressed in, I thought, rather a pompous way, and very much in contrast with his previous politeness before others. Captain Delmar informed her that

he should take me immediately under his protection, pay all my expenses, and, if I behaved well, advance me in the service.

At this announcement, my mother expressed a great deal of gratitude, and, shedding a few tears, said, that the boy would in future look up to him as a parent. To this speech Captain Delmar made no reply; but, changing the conversation, told her that he expected to sail in about three or four days, and that no time must be lost in fitting me out; that, all things considered, he thought it advisable that she should return at once to Chatham, and leave the boy with him as she could not know what was requisite for me, and would therefore be of no use.

At the idea of parting with me, my mother cried bitterly. Captain Delmar did then rise off his chair, and taking my mother by the hand speak to her a few words of consolation. My mother removed her handkerchief from her eyes and sighed deeply, saying to Captain Delmar, with an appealing look, "Oh! Captain Delmar, remember that for you I have indeed made great sacrifices; do not forget them, when you look at that boy, who is very dear to me."

"I will do him justice," replied the captain, somewhat affected, "but I must insist upon inviolable secrecy on your part; you must promise me that under any circumstances—"

"I have obeyed you for thirteen years," replied my mother; "I am not likely to forget my promise now; it is hard to part with him, but I leave him in the hands of—"

"You forget the boy is there," interrupted Captain Delmar; "take him away now; to-morrow morning I will send my coxswain for him, and you must go back to Chatham."

"God bless you, sir," replied my mother, weeping, as Captain Delmar shook her hand, and then we left the room. As we were walking back to our lodging, I inquired of my mother—"What's the secret between you and Captain Delmar, mother?"

"The secret, child! Oh, something which took place at the time I was living with his aunt, and which he does not wish to have known; so ask me no more questions about it."

After our return, my mother gave me a great deal of advice. She told me that, as I had lost my father Ben, I must now look upon Captain Delmar as a father to me; that Ben had been a faithful servant to the captain, and that she had been the same to Mrs Delmar, his aunt; and that was the reason why Captain Delmar was interested about me, and had promised to do so much for me; begging me to treat him with great respect and never venture to play him any tricks, or otherwise he would be highly offended, and send me home again; and then I should never rise to be an officer in his Majesty's service.

I cannot say the advice received the attention it deserved, for I felt more inclined to play tricks to my honourable captain than any person I ever met with; however, I appeared to consent, and, in return begged my mother to take care of my dog Bob, which she promised to do.

My mother cried a great deal during the night; the next morning she gave me five guineas as pocket-money, recommending me to be careful of it, and telling me I must look to Captain Delmar for my future supply. She tied up the little linen I had brought with me in a handkerchief, and shortly after the coxswain knocked at the door, and came upstairs to claim me for his Majesty's service.

"I'm come for the youngster, if you please, marm," said the coxswain, a fine, tall seaman, remarkably clean and neat in his dress.

My mother put her arms round me, and burst into tears.

"I beg your pardon, marm," said the coxswain, after standing silent about a minute, "but could not you *do the piping* after the youngster's gone? If I stay here long I shall be blowed up by the skipper, as sure as my name's Bob Cross."

"I will detain you but a few seconds longer," replied my mother; "I may never see him again."

"Well, that's a fact; my poor mother never did me," replied the coxswain.

This observation did not raise my mother's spirits. Another pause ensued, during which I was bedewed with her tears, when the coxswain approached again—

“I ax your pardon, marm; but if you know anything of Captain Delmar, you must know he’s not a man to be played with, and you would not wish to get me into trouble. It’s a hard thing to part with a child, I’m told, but it wouldn’t help me if I said anything about your tears. If the captain were to go to the boat, and find me not there, he’d just say, ‘What were my orders, sir?’ and after that, you know, marm, there is not a word for me to say.”

“Take him, then, my good man,” replied my mother, pressing me convulsively to her heart —“take him; Heaven bless you, my dear child.”

“Thanky, marm; that’s kind of you,” replied the coxswain. “Come, my little fellow, we’ll soon make a man of you.”

I once more pressed my lips to my poor mother’s, and she resigned me to the coxswain, at the same time taking some silver off the table and putting it into his hand.

“Thanky, marm; that’s kinder still, to think of another when you’re in distress yourself; I shan’t forget it. I’ll look after the lad a bit for you, as sure as my name’s Bob Cross.”

My mother sank down on the sofa, with her handkerchief to her eyes.

Bob Cross caught up the bundle, and led me away. I was very melancholy, for I loved my mother, and could not bear to see her so distressed, and for some time we walked on without speaking.

The coxswain first broke the silence:— “What’s your name, my little Trojan?” said he.

“Percival Keene.”

“Well I’m blessed if I didn’t think that you were one of the Delmar breed, by the cut of your jib; howsomever, it’s a wise child that knows its own father.”

“Father’s dead,” replied I.

“Dead! Well, fathers do die sometimes; you must get on how you can without one. I don’t think fathers are of much use, for, you see, mothers take care of you till you’re old enough to go to sea. My father did nothing for me, except to help mother to lick me, when I was obstropolous.”

The reader, from what he has already been informed about Ben, the marine, may easily conceive that I was very much of Bob Cross’s opinion.

“I suppose you don’t know anybody on board—do you?”

“Yes, I know Tommy Dott—I knew him when the ship was at Chatham.”

“Oh! Mr Tommy Dott; I dare say you’re just like him, for you look full of mischief. He’s a very nice young man for a small party, as the saying is; there is more devil in his little carcass than in two women’s, and that’s not a trifle; you’ll hunt in couples, I dare say, and get well flogged at the same gun, if you don’t take care. Now, here we are, and I must report my arrival with you under convoy.”

Bob Cross sent a waiter for the captain’s steward, who went up to Captain Delmar. I was ordered to go upstairs, and again found myself in the presence of the noble captain, and a very stout elderly man, with a flaxen wig.

“This is the lad,” said Captain Delmar, when I came into the room and walked up to him; “you know exactly what he requires; oblige me by seeing him properly fitted out and the bill sent in to me.”

“Your orders shall be strictly obeyed, Captain Delmar,” said the old gentleman, with a profound bow.

“You had better not order too many things, as he is growing fast; it will be easy to make good any deficiencies as they may be required.”

“Your orders shall be most strictly obeyed, Captain Delmar,” replied the old gentleman, with another bow.

“I hardly know what to do with him for to-day and to-morrow, until his uniforms are made,” continued the captain: “I suppose he must go on board.”

“If you have no objection, Captain Delmar,” said the old gentleman, with another low bow, “I am sure that Mrs Culpepper will be most proud to take charge of any *protégé* of yours; we have a spare bed, and the young gentleman can remain with us until he is ready to embark in the uniform of his rank.”

“Be it so, Mr Culpepper; let your wife take care of him until all is complete, and his chest is ready. You’ll oblige me by arranging about his mess.”

“Your wishes shall be most strictly attended to, Captain Delmar,” replied Mr Culpepper, with another profound inclination, which made me feel very much inclined to laugh.

“If you have no further orders, Captain Delmar, I will now take the young gentleman with me.”

“Nothing more, Mr Culpepper—good morning,” replied Captain Delmar, who neither said how d’ye do to me when I came in, or good bye when I went away in company with Mr Culpepper. I had yet to learn what a thing of no consequence was a “sucking Nelson.”

I followed Mr Culpepper down stairs, who desired me to remain with the coxswain, who was standing under the archway, while he spoke to the captain’s steward.

“Well,” said Bob Cross, “what’s the ticket, youngster,—are you to go abroad with me?”

“No,” said I; “I am to stay on shore with that old chap, who does nothing but bob his head up and down. Who is he?”

“That’s our nipcheese.”

“Nipcheese!”

“Yes; nipcheese means purser of the ship—you’ll find all that out by-and-by; you’ve got lots to larn, and, by way of a hint, make him your friend if you can, for he earwigs the captain in fine style.”

Perceiving that I did not understand him, Bob Cross continued: “I mean that our captain’s very fond of the officers paying him great respect, and he likes all that bowing and scraping; he don’t like officers or men to touch their hats, but to take them right off their heads when they speak to him. You see, he’s a sprig of nobility, as they call it, and what’s more he’s also a post-captain, and thinks no small beer of himself; so don’t forget what I say—here comes the purser.”

Mr Culpepper now came out, and, taking my hand, led me away to his own house, which was at Southsea. He did not speak a word during the walk, but appeared to be in deep cogitation: at last we arrived at his door.

Chapter Fourteen

Why is it that I detain the reader with Mr Culpepper and his family? I don't know, but I certainly have an inclination to linger over every little detail of events which occurred upon my first plunging into the sea of life, just as naked boys on the New River side stand shivering a while, before they can make up their minds to dash into the unnatural element; for men are not ducks, although they do show some affinity to geese by their venturing upon the treacherous fluid.

The door was opened, and I found myself in the presence of Mrs Culpepper and her daughter,—the heiress, as I afterwards discovered, to all Mr Culpepper's savings, which were asserted to be something considerable after thirty years' employment as purser of various vessels belonging to his Majesty.

Mrs Culpepper was in person enormous—she looked like a feather-bed standing on end; her cheeks were as large as a dinner-plate, eyes almost as imperceptible as a mole's, nose just visible, mouth like a round O. It was said that she was once a great Devonshire beauty. Time, who has been denominated *Edax rerum*, certainly had as yet left her untouched, reserving her for a *bonne bouche* on some future occasion.

She sat in a very large arm-chair—indeed, no common-sized chair could have received her capacious person. She did not get up when I entered; indeed, as I discovered, she made but two attempts to stand during the twenty-four hours; one was to come out of her bedroom, which was on the same floor as the parlour, and the other to go in again.

Miss Culpepper was somewhat of her mother's build. She might have been twenty years old, and was, for a girl of her age, exuberantly fat; yet as her skin and complexion were not coarse, many thought her handsome; but she promised to be as large as her mother, and certainly was not at all suited for a wife to a subaltern of a marching regiment.

“Who have we here?” said Mrs Culpepper to her husband, in a sort of low croak; for she was so smothered with fat that she could not get her voice out.

“Well, I hardly know,” replied the gentleman, wiping his forehead; “but I've my own opinion.”

“Mercy on me, how very like!” exclaimed Miss Culpepper, looking at me, and then at her father. “Would not you like to go into the garden, little boy?” continued she: “there, through the passage, out of the door,—you can't miss it.”

As this was almost a command, I did not refuse to go; but as soon as I was in the garden, which was a small patch of ground behind the house, as the window to the parlour was open, and my curiosity was excited by their evidently wishing to say something which they did not wish me to hear, I stopped under the window and listened.

“The very picture of him,” continued the young lady.

“Yes, yes, very like indeed,” croaked the old one.

“All I know is,” said Mr Culpepper, “Captain Delmar has desired me to fit him out, and that he pays all the expenses.”

“Well, that's another proof,” said the young lady; “he wouldn't pay for other people's children.”

“He was brought down here by a very respectable-looking, I may say interesting, and rather pretty woman,—I should think about thirty.”

“Then she must have been handsome when this boy was born,” replied the young lady: “I consider that another proof. Where is she?”

“Went away this morning by the day-coach, leaving the boy with the captain, who sent his coxswain for him.”

“There's mystery about that,” rejoined the daughter, “and therefore I consider it another proof.”

“Yes,” said Mr Culpepper, “and a strong one too. Captain Delmar is so high and mighty, that he would not have it thought that he could ever condescend to have an intrigue with one beneath him in rank and station, and he has sent her away on that account, depend upon it.”

“Just so; and if that boy is not a son of Captain Delmar, I’m not a woman.”

“I am of that opinion,” replied the father, “and therefore I offered to take charge of him, as the captain did not know what to do with him till his uniform was ready.”

“Well,” replied Miss Culpepper, “I’ll soon find out more. I’ll pump everything that he knows out of him before he leaves us; I know how to put that and that together.”

“Yes,” croaked the fat mother; “Medea knows how to put that and that together, as well as any one.”

“You must be very civil and very kind to him,” said Mr Culpepper; “for depend upon it, the very circumstance of the captain’s being compelled to keep the boy at a distance will make him feel more fond of him.”

“I’ve no patience with the men in that respect,” observed the young lady: “how nobility can so demean themselves I can’t think; no wonder they are ashamed of what they have done, and will not acknowledge their own offspring.”

“No, indeed,” croaked the old lady.

“If a woman has the misfortune to yield to her inclinations, they don’t let her off so easily,” exclaimed Miss Medea.

“No, indeed,” croaked the mamma again.

“Men make the laws and break them,” continued Miss Culpepper. “Mere brute strength, even in the most civilised society. If all women had only the spirit that I have, there would be a little alteration, and more justice.”

“I can’t pretend to argue with you, Medea,” replied Mr Culpepper; “I take the world as I find it, and make the best of it. I must go now,—my steward is waiting for me at the victualling office. Just brush my hat a little, Medea, the wind has raised the nap, and then I’ll be off.”

I walked very softly from the window; a new light had burst upon me. Young as I was, I also could put that and that together. I called to mind the conduct of my mother towards her husband Ben; the dislike of my grandmother to Captain Delmar; the occasional conversations I had overheard; the question of my mother checked before it was finished—“If I knew who it was that I had been playing the trick to;” the visits my mother received from Captain Delmar, who was so haughty and distant to everybody; his promise to provide for me, and my mother’s injunctions to me to be obedient and look up to him as a father, and the remarks of the coxswain, Bob Cross,—“If I were not of the Delmar breed:” all this, added to what I had just overheard, satisfied me that they were not wrong in their conjectures, and that I really was the son of the honourable captain.

My mother had gone; I would have given worlds to have gained this information before, that I might have questioned her, and obtained the truth from her; but that was now impossible, and I felt convinced that writing was of no use. I recollected the conversation between her and the Captain, in which she promised to keep the secret, and the answer she gave me when I questioned her; nothing, then, but my tears and entreaties could have any effect, and those, I knew, were powerful over her; neither would it be of any use to ask Aunt Milly, for she would not tell her sister’s secrets, so I resolved to say nothing about it for the present; and I did not forget that Mr Culpepper had said that Captain Delmar would be annoyed if it was supposed that I was his son; I resolved, therefore, that I would not let him imagine that I knew anything about it, or had any idea of it.

I remained more than an hour in deep thought, and it was strange what a tumult there was in my young heart at this discovery. I hardly comprehended the nature of my position, yet I felt pleased on the whole; I felt as if I were of more importance; nay, that I was more capable of thinking and acting than I was twenty-four hours before.

My reveries were, however, disturbed by Miss Medea, who came to the back-door and asked me if I was not tired of walking, and if I would not like to come in.

“Are you not hungry, Master Keene? Would you like to have a nice piece of cake and a glass of currant wine before dinner? We shall not dine till three o’clock.”

“If you please,” replied I: for I would not refuse the bribe, although I had a perfect knowledge why it was offered.

Miss Medea brought the cake and wine. As soon as I had despatched them, which did not take very long, she commenced her pumping, as I had anticipated, and which I was determined to thwart, merely out of opposition.

“You were sorry to leave your mamma, weren’t you, Master Keene?”

“Yes; very sorry, miss.”

“Where’s your papa, dearest? He’s a very pretty boy, mamma, ain’t he?” continued the young lady, putting her fingers through my chestnut curls.

“Yes; handsome boy,” croaked the old lady.

“Papa’s dead.”

“Dead! I thought so,” observed Miss Medea, winking at her mother.

“Did you ever see your papa, dearest?”

“Oh yes; he went to sea about eighteen months ago, and he was killed in action.”

After this came on a series of questions and cross-questions; I replied to her so as to make it appear that Ben was my father, and nobody else, although I had then a very different opinion. The fact was, I was determined that I would not be pumped, and I puzzled them, for I stated that my aunt Milly was married to Captain Bridgeman, of the marines; and not till then did Miss Medea ask me what my father was. My reply was that he had also been in the marines, and they consequently put him down as a marine officer, as well as Captain Bridgeman.

This added so much to the respectability of my family, that they were quite mystified, and found that it was not quite so easy to put that and that together as they had thought.

As soon as they were tired of questioning, they asked me if I would not like to take another turn in the garden, to which I consented; and, placing myself under the window as before, I heard Miss Medea say to her mother—

“Father’s always finding out some mare’s nest or another; and because there is some likeness to the captain, he has, in his great wit, made an important discovery. It’s quite evident that he’s wrong, as he generally is. It’s not very likely that Captain Delmar should have had an intrigue with the wife of a marine officer, and her sister married also into the corps. The widow has brought him down herself, it is true, but that proves nothing; who else was to bring him down, if it was not his mother? and the very circumstance of her going away so soon proves that she felt it improper that she should remain; and, in my opinion, that she is a modest, interesting young woman, in whom Captain Delmar has taken an interest. I wish father would not come here with his nonsensical ideas, telling us to make much of the boy.”

“Very true, Medea,” replied the mother; “you might have saved that cake and wine.”

Thinks I to myself, you have not pumped me, and I never felt more delighted than at having outwitted them. I thought it, however, prudent to walk away from the window.

Shortly afterwards, Mr Culpepper returned, accompanied by one of the numerous Portsmouth fitting-out tailors. I was summoned; the tailor presented a list of what he declared to be absolutely necessary for the outfit of a gentleman.

Mr Culpepper struck out two-thirds of the articles, and desired the remainder to be ready on the Friday morning, it being then Wednesday. The tailor promised faithfully, and Mr Culpepper also promised most faithfully, that if the articles were not ready, they would be left on his hands. As soon as the tailor had gone, Miss Medea asked me if I would not like to take another run in the garden.

I knew that she wished to speak to her father, and therefore had a pleasure in disappointing her. I therefore replied, that I had been there nearly the whole day, and did not wish to go out any more.

“Never mind whether you wish it or not; I wish you to go,” replied Miss Medea, tartly.

“Medea, how can you be so rude?” cried Mr Culpepper; “surely Mr Keene may do as he pleases. I’m surprised at you, Medea.”

“And I’m surprised at you, papa, finding out a mystery when there is none,” replied Miss Medea, very cross. “All you said this morning, and all your surmises, have turned out to be all moonshine. Yes, you may look, papa; I tell you—all moonshine.”

“Why, Medea, what nonsense you are talking,” replied Mr Culpepper.

“Medea’s right,” croaked Mrs Culpepper; “all moonshine.”

“So you need not be so very particular, papa, I can tell you,” rejoined Miss Medea, who then whispered in her father’s ear, loud enough for me to hear, “No such thing, nothing but a regular marine.”

“Pooh, nonsense,” replied the purser, in a low voice; “the boy has been taught to say it—he’s too clever for you, Medea.”

At this very true remark of her father’s, Miss Medea swelled into a towering passion, her whole face, neck, and shoulders—for she wore a low gown in the morning—turning to a fiery scarlet. I never saw such a fury as she appeared to be. She rushed by me so roughly, that I was thrown back a couple of paces, and then she bounced out of the room.

“Medea knows how to put that and that together, Mr Culpepper,” croaked out Mrs Culpepper.

“Medea’s wise in her own conceit, and you’re a regular old fool,” rejoined Mr Culpepper, with asperity; “one too knowing and the other not half knowing enough. Master Keene, I hope you are hungry, for we have a very nice dinner. Do you like ducks and green peas?”

“Yes, sir, very much,” replied I.

“Were you born at Chatham, Master Keene?”

“No, sir, I was born at the Hall, near Southampton. My mother was brought up by old Mrs Delmar, the captain’s aunt.”

I gave this intelligence on purpose; as I knew it would puzzle Miss Medea, who had just returned from the kitchen.

Mr Culpepper nodded his head triumphantly to his daughter and wife, who both appeared dumb-founded at this new light thrown upon the affair.

Miss Medea paused a moment and then said to me,—“I wish to ask you one question, Master Keene.”

“I will not answer any more of your questions, miss,” replied I; “You have been questioning me all the morning, and just now, you were so rude as nearly to push me down. If you want to know anything more, ask Captain Delmar; or, if you wish it, I will ask Captain Delmar whether I am to answer you, and if he says I am, I will, but not without.”

This was a decided blow on my part; mother and Medea both looked frightened, and Mr Culpepper was more alarmed than either of the females. It proved to them that I knew what they were inquiring for, which was to them also proof that I also knew who I was; and further, my reference to Captain Delmar satisfied them that I felt sure of his support, and they knew that he would be very much irritated if I told him on what score they had been pumping me.

“You are very right, Master Keene,” said Mr Culpepper, turning very red, “to refuse to answer any questions you don’t like; and, Medea, I’m surprised at your behaviour; I insist upon it you do not annoy Master Keene with any more of your impertinent curiosity.”

“No, no,” croaked the old lady; “hold your tongue, Medea, hold your tongue.”

Miss Medea, who looked as if she could tear my eyes out if she dared, swallowed down her rage as well as she could. She was mortified at finding she had made a mistake, annoyed at my answering

her so boldly, and frightened at her father's anger; for the old gentleman was very apt to vent it in the *argumentum ad feminam*, and box her ears soundly.

Fortunately dinner was served just at this moment, and this gave a turn to the conversation, and also to their thoughts. Mr Culpepper was all attention, and Miss Medea, gradually recovering her temper, also became affable and condescending.

The evening passed away very agreeably; but I went to bed early, as I wished to be left to my own reflections, and it was not till daylight that I could compose my troubled mind so as to fall asleep.

Chapter Fifteen

Although the aversion which I had taken to the whole Culpepper family was so great, that I could have done anything to annoy them, my mind was now so fully occupied with the information which I had collected relative to my supposed birth and parentage, that I could not think of mischief.

I walked on the common or in the little garden during the whole of the following day, plunged in deep thought, and at night, when I went to bed, I remained awake till the dawn. During these last two days I had thought and reflected more than I had perhaps done from the hour of my birth.

That I was better off than I should have been if I had been the son of a private in the marines, I felt convinced; but still I had a feeling that I was in a position in which I might be subjected to much insult, and that, unless I was acknowledged by my aristocratic parent, my connection with his family would be of no use to me;—and Captain Delmar, how was I to behave to him? I did not like him much, that was certain, nor did this new light which had burst forth make me feel any more love for him than I did before. Still my mother's words at Chatham rung in my ears, "Do you know who it is that you have been?" etcetera. I felt sure that he was my father, and I felt a sort of duty towards him; perhaps an increase of respect.

These were anxious thoughts for a boy not fourteen; and the Culpeppers remarked, that I had not only looked very pale, but had actually grown thin in the face during my short stay.

As I was very quiet and reserved after the first day, they were very glad when my clothes were brought home, and I was reported ready to embark; so was I, for I wanted to go on board and see my friend Tommy Dott, with whom I intended, if the subject was brought up, to consult as to my proceedings, or perhaps I thought it would be better to consult Bob Cross, the captain's coxswain; I was not sure that I should not advise with them both.

I had made up my mind how to behave to my mother. I knew that she would never acknowledge the truth, after what had passed between the captain and her when I was present; but I was resolved that I would let her know that I was in the secret; and I thought that the reply to me would be a guide as to the correctness of the fact, which, with all the hastiness of boyhood, I considered as incontrovertible, although I had not the least positive proof.

The day that I was to go on board, I requested Miss Culpepper to give me a sheet of paper, that I might write to my mother; she supplied me very readily, saying, "You had better let me see if you make any mistake in your spelling before the letter goes; your mamma will be so pleased if you write your letter properly." She then went down into the kitchen to give some orders.

As I had not the slightest intention that she should read what I wrote, and resolved to have it in the post before she came up again, I was very concise in my epistle, which was as follows:—

"Dear Mother:— I have found it all out—I am the son of Captain Delmar, and everyone here knows what you have kept a secret from me. I go on board to-day.

"Yours truly, *P. Keene.*"

This was very short, and, it must be admitted, direct to the point. I could not perhaps have written one which was so calculated to give my mother uneasiness.

As soon as it was finished, I folded it up, and lighted a taper to seal it. Old Mrs Culpepper, who was in the room, croaked out, "No, no; you must show it to Medea." But I paid no attention to her, and having sealed my letter, put on my hat, and walked out to the post-office. I dropped it into the box, and, on returning, found Mr Culpepper coming home, accompanied by Bob Cross, the captain's coxswain, and two of the boat's crew.

As I presumed, they were sent for me; I joined them immediately, and was kindly greeted by Bob Cross, who said:—

"Well, Mr Keene, are you all ready for shipping? We've come for your traps."

“All ready,” replied I, “and very glad to go, for I’m tired of staying on shore doing nothing.”

We were soon at the house; the seamen carried away my chest and bedding, while Bob Cross remained a little while, that I might pay my farewell to the ladies.

The ceremony was not attended with much regret on either side. Miss Culpepper could not help asking me why I did not show her my letter, and I replied, that there were secrets in it, which answer did not at all add to her good temper; our adieus were, therefore, anything but affectionate, and before the men with my effects were a hundred yards in advance, Bob Cross and I were at their heels.

“Well, Master Keene,” said Bob, as we wended our way across South Sea Common, “how do you like the purser’s ladies?”

“Not at all,” replied I; “they have done nothing but try to pump me the whole time I have been there; but they did not make much of it.”

“Women will be curious, Master Keene—pray what did they try to pump about?”

I hardly knew how to reply, and I hesitated. I felt a strong inclination towards Bob Cross, and I had before reflected whether I should make him my confidant; still, I was undecided and made no reply, when Bob Cross answered for me:—

“Look ye, child—for although you’re going on the quarter-deck, and I am before the mast, you are a child compared to me—I can tell you what they tried to pump about, as well as you can tell me, if you choose. According to my thinking, there’s no lad on board the frigate that will require good advice as you will; and I tell you candidly, you will have your cards to play. Bob Cross is no fool, and can see as far through a fog as most chaps; I like you for yourself as far as I see of you, and I have not forgotten your mother’s kindness to me, when she had her own misery to occupy her thoughts; not that I wanted the money—it wasn’t the money, but the way and the circumstances under which it was given. I told you I’d look after you a bit—a bit means a great deal with me—and so I will, if you choose that I shall; if not, I shall touch my hat to you, as my officer, which won’t help you very much. So, now you have to settle, my lad, whether you will have me as your friend, or not.”

The appeal quite decided me. “Bob Cross,” replied I. “I do wish to make you my friend; I thought of it before, but I did not know whether to go to you or to Tommy Dott.”

“Tommy Dott! Well, Master Keene, that’s not very flattering, to put me in one scale, and Tommy Dott in the other; I’m not surprised at its weighing down in my favour. If you wish to get into mischief you can’t apply to a better hand than Tommy Dott; but Tommy Dott is not half so fit to advise you, as you are, I expect, to advise him; so make him your playmate and companion, if you please, but as to his advice, it’s not worth asking. However, as you have given me the preference, I will now tell you that the Culpepper people have been trying to find out who is your father. Ain’t I right?”

“Yes, you are,” replied I.

“Well, then, this is no time to talk about such things; we shall be down to the boat in another minute, so we’ll say no more at present; only recollect, when you are on board, if they talk about appointing a man to take charge of your hammock, say that Bob Cross, the captain’s coxswain, is, you understand, to be the person; say that and no more. I will tell you why by-and-by, when we have time to talk together and if any of your messmates say anything to you on the same point which the Culpeppers have been working at, make no reply and hold yourself very stiff. Now, here we are at the sally port, so there’s an end to our palaver for the present.”

My chest and bedding were already in the boat, and as soon as Cross and I had stepped in he ordered the bowman to shove off; in half an hour we arrived alongside the frigate, which lay at Spithead, bright with new paint, and with her pennant proudly flying to the breeze.

“You’d better follow me, sir, and mind you touch your hat when the officers speak to you,” said Bob Cross, ascending the accommodation ladder. I did so, and found myself on the quarter deck, in the presence of the first lieutenant and several of the officers.

“Well, Cross,” said the first lieutenant.

“I’ve brought a young gentleman on board to join the ship. Captain Delmar has, I believe, given his orders about him.”

“Mr Keene, I presume?” said the first lieutenant, eyeing me from head to foot.

“Yes, sir,” replied I, touching my hat.

“How long have you been at Portsmouth?”

“Three days, sir; I have been staying at Mr Culpepper’s.”

“Well, did you fall in love with Miss Culpepper?”

“No, sir,” replied I; “I hate her.”

At this answer the first lieutenant and the officers near him burst out a-laughing.

“Well, youngster, you must dine with us in the gun-room to-day; and where’s Mr Dott?”

“Here, sir,” said Tommy Dott, coming from the other side of the quarter-deck.

“Mr Dott, take this young gentleman down below, and show him the midshipmen’s berth. Let me see, who is to take care of his hammock?”

“I believe that Bob Cross is to take care of it, sir,” said I.

“The captain’s coxswain—humph. Well, that’s settled at all events; very good—we shall have the pleasure of your company to dinner, Mr Keene. Why, Mr Dott and you look as if you knew each other.”

“Don’t we, Tommy?” said I to the midshipman, grinning.

“I suspect that there is a pair of you,” said the first lieutenant, turning aft and walking away; after which Tommy and I went down the companion ladder as fast as we could, and in a few seconds afterwards were sitting together on the same chest, in most intimate conversation.

My extreme resemblance to our honourable captain was not unobserved by the officers who were on the quarter-deck at the time of my making my appearance; and, as I afterwards heard from Bob Cross, he was sent for by the surgeon, on some pretence or another, to obtain any information relative to me. What were Bob Cross’s reasons for answering as he did I could not at that time comprehend, but he explained them to me afterwards.

“Who brought him down, Cross?” said the surgeon, carelessly.

“His own mother, sir; he has no father, sir, I hear.”

“Did you see her? What sort of a person was she?”

“Well, sir,” replied Bob Cross, “I’ve seen many ladies of quality, but such a real lady I don’t think I ever set my eyes upon before; and such a beauty—I’d marry to-morrow if I could take in tow a craft like her.”

“How did they come down to Portsmouth?”

“Why, sir, she came down to Portsmouth in a coach and four; but she walked to the George Hotel, as if she was nobody.”

This was not a fib on the part of the coxswain, for we came down by the Portsmouth coach; it did, however, deceive the surgeon, as was intended.

“Did you see anything of her, Cross?”

“Not when she was with the captain, sir, but at her own lodgings I did; such a generous lady I never met with.”

A few more questions were put, all of which were replied to in much the same strain by the coxswain, so as to make out my mother to be a very important and mysterious personage. It is true that Tommy Dott could have contradicted all this; but, in the first place, it was not very likely that there would be any communication upon the point between him and the officers; and in the next I cautioned him to say nothing about what he knew, which, as he was strongly attached to me, he strictly complied with: so Bob Cross completely mystified the surgeon, who, of course, made his report to his messmates.

Mr Culpepper’s report certainly differed somewhat from that of Bob Cross. There was my statement of my aunt being married to a marine officer—but it was my statement; there was also

my statement of my mother residing with Captain Delmar's aunt; altogether there was doubt and mystery; and it ended in my mother being supposed to be a much greater person than she really was—everything tending to prove her a lady of rank being willingly received, and all counter-statements looked upon as apocryphal and false.

But whoever my mother might be, on one point every one agreed, which was, that I was the son of the Honourable Captain Delmar, and on this point I was equally convinced myself. I waited with some anxiety for my mother's reply to my letter, which arrived two days after I had joined the frigate. It was as follows:—

“My dear Percival:—

“You little know the pain and astonishment which I felt upon receipt of your very unkind and insulting letter; surely you could not have reflected at the time you wrote it, but must have penned it in a moment of irritation arising from some ungenerous remark which has been made in your hearing.

“Alas, my dear child, you will find, now that you have commenced your career in life, that there are too many whose only pleasure is to inflict pain upon their fellow-creatures. I only can imagine that some remark has been made in your presence, arising from there being a similarity of features between you and the Honourable Captain Delmar; that there is so has been before observed by others. Indeed your uncle and aunt Bridgeman were both struck with the resemblance, when Captain Delmar arrived at Chatham; but this proves nothing, my dear child—people are very often alike, who have never seen each other, or heard each other mentioned, till they have by accident been thrown together so as to be compared.

“It may certainly be, as your father was in the service of Captain Delmar, and constantly attended upon him, and indeed I may add as I was occasionally seeing him, that the impression of his countenance might be constantly in our memory, and—but you don't understand such questions, and therefore I will say no more, except that you will immediately dismiss from your thoughts any such idea.

“You forget, my dearest boy, that you are insulting me by supposing any such thing, and that your mother's honour is called in question; I am sure you never thought of that when you wrote those hasty and inconsiderate lines. I must add, my dear boy, that knowing Captain Delmar, and how proud and sensitive he is, if it should ever come to his knowledge that you had suspected or asserted what you have, his favour and protection would be lost to you for ever: at present he is doing a kind and charitable action in bringing forward the son of a faithful servant; but if he imagined for a moment that you were considered related to him he would cast you off for ever, and all your prospects in life would be ruined.

“Even allowing it possible that you were what you so madly stated yourself in your letter to be, I am convinced he would do so. If such a report came to his ears, he would immediately disavow you, and leave you to find your own way in the world.

“You see, therefore, my dear boy, how injurious to you in every way such a ridiculous surmise must prove, and I trust that, not only for your own sake, but for your mother's character, you will, so far from giving credence, indignantly disavow what must be a source of mischief and annoyance to all parties.

“Captain Bridgeman desires me to say, that he is of my opinion, so is your aunt Milly: as for your grandmother, of course, I dare not show her your letter. Write to me, my dear boy, and tell me how this unfortunate mistake happened, and believe me to be your affectionate mother, *Arabella Keene.*”

I read this letter over ten times before I came to any conclusion; at last I said to myself, there is not in any one part of it any positive denial of the fact, and resolved some future day, when I had had some conversation with Bob Cross, to show it to him, and ask his opinion.

Chapter Sixteen

The next morning, at daylight, the blue Peter was hoisted at the foremast, and the gun fired as a signal for sailing; all was bustle—hoisting in, clearing boats of stock, and clearing the ship of women and strangers.

At ten o'clock Captain Delmar made his appearance, the hands were piped up anchor, and in half an hour we were standing out for St. Helen's. Before night it blew very fresh, and we went rolling down the Channel before an easterly wind. I went to my hammock very sick, and did not recover for several days, during which nobody asked for me, or any questions about me, except Bob Cross and Tommy Dott.

As soon as I was well enough, I made my appearance on deck, and was ordered by the first lieutenant to do my duty under the signal midshipman: this was day duty, and not very irksome; I learnt the flags, and how to use a spy-glass.

We were charged with despatches for the fleet, then off Cadiz, and on the tenth day we fell in with it, remained a week in company, and then were ordered to Gibraltar and Malta. From Malta we went home again with despatches, having been out three months.

During this short and pleasant run, I certainly did not learn much of my profession, but I did learn a little of the ways of the world. First, as to Captain Delmar, his conduct to me was anything but satisfactory; he never inquired for me during the time that I was unwell, and took no notice of me on my reappearance.

The officers and young gentlemen, as midshipmen are called, were asked to dine in the cabin in rotation, and I did in consequence dine two or three times in the cabin; but it appeared to me, as if the captain purposely took no notice of me, although he generally did say a word or two to the others; moreover as the signal mids were up in the morning watch, he would occasionally send to invite one of the others to breakfast with him, but he never paid me that compliment.

This annoyed me, and I spoke of it to Bob Cross, with whom I had had some long conversations. I had told him all I knew relative to myself, what my suspicions were, and I had shown him my mother's reply. His opinion on the subject may be given in what follows:—

“You see, Master Keene, you are in an awkward position; the captain is a very proud man, and too proud to acknowledge that you are any way related to him. It's my opinion, from what you have told me, and from other reasons, particularly from your likeness to the captain, that your suspicions are correct; but, what then? Your mother is sworn to secrecy—that's clear; and the captain won't own you—that's also very clear. I had some talk with the captain's steward on the subject when I was taking a glass of grog with him the other night in this berth. It was he that brought up the subject, not me, and he said, that the captain not asking you to breakfast, and avoiding you, as it were, was another proof that you belonged to him; and the wishing to hide the secret only makes him behave as he does. You have a difficult game to play, Master Keene; but you are a clever lad, and you ask advice—mind you follow it, or it's little use asking it. You must always be very respectful to Captain Delmar, and keep yourself at as great a distance from him as he does from you.”

“That I'm sure I will,” replied I, “for I dislike him very much.”

“No, you must not do that, but you must bend to circumstances; by-and-by things will go on better; but mind you keep on good terms with the officers, and never be saucy, or they may say to you what may not be pleasant; recollect this, and things will go on better, as I said before. If Captain Delmar protects you with his interest, you will be a captain over the heads of many who are now your superiors on board of this frigate. One thing be careful of, which is, to keep your own counsel, and don't be persuaded in a moment of confidence to trust anything to Tommy Dott, or any other midshipman; and if any one hints at what you suppose, deny it immediately; nay, if necessary, fight for it—that will be the way to please the captain, for you will be of his side then, and not against him.”

That this advice of Bob Cross was the best that could be given to one in my position there could not be a doubt; and that I did resolve to follow it, is most certain. I generally passed away a portion of my leisure hours in Bob's company, and became warmly attached to him; and certainly my time was not thrown away, for I learnt a great deal from him.

One evening, as I was leaning against one of the guns on the main deck, waiting for Cross to come out of the cabin, I was amused with the following conversation between a boatswain's mate and a fore-top man. I shall give it verbatim. They were talking of one that was dead; and after the boatswain's mate had said—

“Well, he's in heaven, poor fellow.”

After a pause, the fore-top man said—

“I wonder, Bill, whether I shall ever go to heaven?”

“Why not?” replied the boatswain's mate.

“Why, the parson says it's good works; now, I certainly have been a pretty many times in action, and I have killed plenty of Frenchmen in my time.”

“Well, that's sufficient, I should think; I hold my hopes upon just the same claims. I've cut down fifty Frenchmen in my life, and if that ain't good works, I don't know what is.”

“I suppose Nelson's in heaven?”

“Of course; if so be he wishes to be there, I should like to know who would keep him out, if he was determined on it; no, no; depend upon it he walked *slap* in.”

On our return to Portsmouth, the captain went up to the Admiralty with the despatches, the frigate remaining at Spithead, ready to sail at a moment's notice.

I was now quite accustomed to the ship and officers; the conviction I had of my peculiar position, together with the advice of Bob Cross, had very much subdued my spirit; perhaps the respect created by discipline, and the example of others, which produced in me a degree of awe of the captain and the lieutenants, assisted a little—certain it is, that I gained the goodwill of my messmates, and had not been in any scrape during the whole cruise.

The first lieutenant was a stern, but not unkind man; he would blow you up, as we termed it, when he scolded for half an hour without ceasing. I never knew a man with such a flow of words; but if permitted to go on without interruption, he was content, without proceeding to further punishment. Any want of respect, however, was peculiarly offensive to him, and any attempt to excuse yourself was immediately cut short with, “No reply, sir.”

The second day after our return to Spithead, I was sent on shore in the cutter to bring off a youngster who was to join the ship; he had never been to sea before; his name was Green, and he was as green as a gooseberry. I took a dislike to him the moment that I saw him, because he had a hooked nose and very small ferrety eyes. As we were pulling on board he asked me a great many questions of all kinds, particularly about the captain and officers, and to amuse myself and the boat's crew, who were on the full titter, I exercised my peculiar genius for invention.

At last, after I had given a character of the first lieutenant, which made him appear a sort of marine ogre, he asked how it was I got on with him:—

“O, very well,” replied I; “but I'm a freemason, and so is he, and he's never severe with a brother mason.”

“But how did he know you were a mason?”

“I made the sign to him the very first time that he began to scold me, and he left off almost immediately; that is, when I made the second sign; he did not when I made the first.”

“I should like to know these signs. Won't you tell them to me?”

“Tell them to you! oh no, that won't do,” replied I. “I don't know you. Here we are on board—in bow,—rowed of all, men. Now, Mr Green, I'll show you the way up.”

Mr Green was presented, and ushered into the service much in the same way as I was; but he had not forgotten what I said to him relative to the first lieutenant; and it so happened that, on the

third day he witnessed a jobation, delivered by the first lieutenant to one of the midshipmen, who, venturing to reply, was ordered to the mast-head for the remainder of the day; added to which, a few minutes afterwards, the first lieutenant ordered two men to be put both legs in irons. Mr Green trembled as he saw the men led away by the master-at-arms, and he came to me:

“I do wish, Keene, you would tell me those signs,” said he; “can’t you be persuaded to part with them? I’ll give you any thing that I have which you may like.”

“Well,” said I, “I should like to have that long spy-glass of yours, for it’s a very good one; and, as signal-midshipman, will be useful to me.”

“I will give it you with all my heart,” replied he, “if you will tell me the signs.”

“Well, then, come down below, give me the glass, and I will tell them to you.”

Mr Green and I went down to the berth, and I received the spy-glass as a present in due form. I then led him to my chest in the steerage, and in a low, confidential tone, told him as follows:—

“You see, Green, you must be very particular about making those signs, for if you make a mistake, you will be worse off than if you never made them at all, for the first lieutenant will suppose that you are trying to persuade him that you are a mason, when you are not. Now, observe, you must not attempt to make the first sign until he has scolded you well; then, at any pause, you must make it; thus, you see, you must put your thumb to the tip of your nose, and extend your hand straight out from it, with all the fingers separated, as wide as you can. Now, do it as I did it. Stop—wait a little, till that marine passes. Yes, that is it. Well, that is considered the first proof of your being a mason, but it requires a second. The first lieutenant will, I tell you frankly, be or rather pretend to be, in a terrible rage, and will continue to rail at you; you must, therefore, wait a little till he pauses; and then, you observe, put up your thumb to your nose, with the fingers of your hands spread out as before, and then add to it your other hand, by joining your other thumb to the little finger of the hand already up, and stretch your other hand and fingers out like the first. Then you will see the effects of the second sign. Do you think you can recollect all this? for, as I said before, you must make no mistake.”

Green put his hands up as I told him, and after three or four essays declared himself perfect, and I left him.

It was about three days afterwards that Mr Green upset a kid of dirty water upon the lower deck which had been dry holystoned, and the mate of the lower deck, when the first lieutenant went his round, reported the circumstance to exculpate himself. Mr Green was consequently summoned on the quarter-deck; and the first lieutenant, who was very angry, commenced, as usual, a volley of abuse on the unfortunate youngster.

Green, recollecting my instructions, waited till the first lieutenant had paused, and then made the first freemason sign, looking up very boldly at the first lieutenant, who actually drew back with astonishment at this contemptuous conduct, hitherto unwitnessed on board of a man-at-war.

“What! sir,” cried the first lieutenant. “Why, sir, are you mad?—you, just come into the service, treating me in this manner! I can tell you, sir, that you will not be three days longer in the service—no, sir, not three days; for either you leave the service or I do. Of all the impudence, of all the insolence, of all the contempt I have heard of, this beats all—and from such a little animal as you. Consider yourself as under an arrest, sir, till the captain comes on board, and your conduct is reported; go down below, sir, immediately.”

The lieutenant paused, and now Green gave him sign the second, as a reply, thinking that they would then come to a right understanding—but to his astonishment, the first lieutenant was more curious than ever; and calling the sergeant of marines, ordered him to take Mr Green down, and put him in irons, under the half-deck.

Poor Green was handed down, all astonishment, at the want of success of his mason’s signs. I, who stood abaft, was delighted at the success of my joke, while the first lieutenant walked hastily up and down the deck, as much astonished as enraged at such insulting and insolent conduct from a lad who had not been a week in the service.

After a time the first lieutenant went down below, when Bob Cross, who was on deck, and who had perceived my delight at the scene, which was to him and all others so inexplicable, came up to me and said:—

“Master Keene, I’m sure, by your looks, you knew something about this. That foolish lad never had dared do so, if he knew what it was he had done. Now, don’t look so demure, but tell me how it is.”

I walked aft with Bob Cross, and confided my secret to him; he laughed heartily, and said:—

“Well, Tommy Dott did say that you were up to any thing, and so I think you are; but you see this is a very serious affair for poor Green, and, like the fable of the frogs, what is sport to you is death to others. The poor lad will be turned out of the service, and lose his chance of being a post captain; so you must allow me to explain the matter so that it gets to the ears of the first lieutenant as soon as possible.”

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