

Marshall Emma

Little Miss Joy



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CHAPTER I.

WAITING AND WATCHING

The sea lay calm and still under a cloudless sky. The tide was out, and there was only a faint murmur like the whisper of gentle voices, as the little waves told to the sands that they were coming back soon, for the tide had turned.

It was yet early morning, and the old town of Great Yarmouth was asleep. The fishing boats had been out all night, and were lying like so many black birds with folded wings, waiting for the flow of the water to bring them to the beach. All the blinds were down in the houses facing the level strand. There was no one moving yet, for the resonant clock of Saint Nicholas Church had only just struck four.

The children of visitors to Yarmouth, tired with their exertions on the sand the evening before, were all wrapt in profound slumber.

Happy seaside children, who had paddled and dived on the beach to their hearts' content, who had braved all the reproaches of mothers and nurses, and had gone home with their buckets full of seaweed, pebbles, and shells, looking like the veriest little ragged waifs and strays, who were known as "the beach children," and who were an ever-moving population gathered from the depths of the town, pattering with naked feet round the boats as they came to shore, to pick up odd fish which fell from the nets as they were spread out to dry.

A great expanse of sand stretches out from Yarmouth, and over this the wind whistles through the long parched grass which grows in patches, interspersed with the little pink mallow and stunted thistles, which are not discouraged by their surroundings, and flourish in spite of difficulties. This wide expanse of sand and sand-mounds is called the Denes; and as little weary feet plod over it, it seems in its vastness a very desert of Sahara. Yet there is a charm about the Denes which the children feel. A sense of freedom, and a power to deal with the sand after their own will, were checked by repeated exhortations from governess or nurse to take care of their clothes. Yet the soft silvery sand can do no harm, and a prick from a blade of the pointed grass, or a scratch from a thistle, are the only dangers that beset it.

The town of Yarmouth lies at some distance from the sea, and possesses one feature of rather unusual interest. There is a fine quay, shaded by trees, alongside which many large ships from all countries lie. There is a wide market-place and several good streets. But the heart and core of the old town is to be found in the "rows," narrow thoroughfares with tall houses on either side, where many a competency, if not a fortune, has been made in days past.

Very little sunshine or light penetrates the rows, and some of the inhabitants have a faded, washed-out look, like that of a plant shut in a dark place, which shows but a faint colour of either leaves or blossom.

Perhaps the pale woman standing by the door of a small shop, the shutters of which were not yet taken down, was a fair specimen of her neighbours. She was tall, but drooped so much that her real height was lost. She had a sad face, where lines of care and anxiety had made a network perhaps earlier in life than wrinkles had any right to appear, if they should be traced by time rather than by sorrow. For Patience Harrison was not an old woman, and had scarcely entered her thirty-sixth year.

As she stood at the narrow entry of the shop, her hands folded, her head bent forward, she might well attract any passer-by, while she looked right and left, as if in hopes of seeing a well-known figure come into the row, from either end.

Up and down, up and down, that eager, hungry glance, with an infinite pathos in the dark eyes, scanned the narrow passage; and grew more pathetic and more hungry every moment.

At last footsteps were heard on the pavement. Patience started, and took a step forward, only to draw back again disappointed.

"The top of the morning to you, Mrs. Harrison. You are about early. It is as fine a summer morning as I ever was out in."

The speaker was a tall, well-knit young man of two or three and thirty, with a fine open countenance, and a broad square brow, round which thick light curls clustered. No contrast could be greater than between Patience Harrison and George Paterson: the man so full of life, and the enjoyment of life; the woman so languid and weary-looking. He seemed as if the world were a pleasant place to him, she as if it were a waste and a wilderness.

"You are up and about early," George repeated. "Indeed, you look as if you hadn't been to bed. I hope you haven't been up all night. Have you, now?"

"Yes. How could I sleep? How could I rest? There was a worse storm than ever last night at supper-time, and – and – Jack ran away out of the house, and has never come back."

"The young rascal!" George exclaimed. "I'd like to thrash him!"

"Oh, don't say so! Don't say so! If ever a boy is scourged by a tongue, Jack is. I mean to leave this house; I can't – I can't bear it any longer."

"Well," George said, his eyes shining with a bright light – the light of hope – "well, there's a home ready for you, you know that. The sooner you come, the better."

"You know I can't do it. Why do you ask me? I wonder you should ask me."

"I see no wonder in it," was the answer. "You've watched and waited for eleven years; sure that's long enough! He will never come back."

"Yes," she said sadly; "yes. I have waited and watched, as you say. It is the business of my life. I shall watch and wait to the end."

George Paterson gave an impatient gesture, and settled the workman's basket on his broad shoulders, as if he were going to walk on. But after a pace or two he seemed to change his mind, and stopping, he said —

"But what about Jack? How did it happen?"

"He offended her yesterday. He brought dirty boots into the parlour; and he blew a tune on the little cornet you gave him, when she told him to be quiet. He upset a jug of water on the table, and he made a face at her, and he called her 'an old cat.' He had no business to call her names."

George laughed.

"A very fitting name, I think; he has felt her claws often enough. Well, what then?"

"Then she boxed his ears – it was at supper – and he flew into a rage, and he would not listen to me, but tore out of the room, out of the house, and has never come back. Oh, George, what if there should be two to wait and watch for, instead of one! Jack! Jack! How could he leave me?"

"He can't have gone far; and, as to being out all night, why, that won't hurt him. The young rascal, to give you all this trouble! Yes, I'll go and hunt for him; and if I catch him, won't I give it to him!"

"No, George; no. Remember his provocation. Remember he has had no father, only a mother like me to control him."

"Only a mother like you! I should like to know where a better could be found! I am sorry for the boy that he has had to live with a cross-grained old maid, but for your sake he ought to have put up with it."

"She means well. She took us in for my father's sake, and she has kept me and the boy from starving."

"You have earned your living; you have worked well for her, and she knows it. But I will go and hunt for Master Jack. See! I will leave my basket of tools here as an assurance that I am coming back. You go and lie down, and I'll have the young master back before an hour is over. Come, go indoors; you look ready to drop."

But Patience shook her head.

"I am used to waiting and watching," she said again; "it's nothing new."

Then her eyes began their search up and down the row, with the same wistful, eager gaze.

George Paterson had put the basket of tools just within the doorway, and turning to her said —

"Look up at that strip of blue sky, Patience; look up, not downward so much."

As he spoke he raised his head, and pointed to the narrow bit of sky which made a deeply blue line above the tops of the tall houses.

"That tells of love," he said — "God's love which is over us. Take heart, and lift it up to Him in your trouble."

George spoke out of the fulness of his own heart: not in any way as if he set himself up to lecture his listener, but just simply to try to raise her thoughts from the gnawing anxiety which had laid hold on her.

"Yes," she said, "the bit of sky is beautiful, but it is so far off; and — don't be angry with me, George, but I wish you would go and find him. Let me come with you!" she exclaimed.

"No, no; I shall be quicker than you are. I can get over the ground in half the time."

Neither asked the other where George would look for the truant. Both had one thought — Jack had been to the quay, and was perhaps on board one of the ships lying there. He had threatened before that he would go to sea, and leave Miss Pinckney and her scoldings and fault-findings behind him.

"If it had not been for his mother he would have done so long ago," he said. "He loved the sea, and he wished to be a sailor, as his father had been before him."

As George's quick, firm steps were heard dying away in the distance, Mrs. Harrison pulled a stool towards her out of the shop, and seated herself just within the doorway.

She was scarcely conscious of anything but the fear, growing greater every moment, that Jack — the sunshine of her life, the light of her eyes — had gone from her. She leaned her head against the door, and looked up at the sky half unconsciously. As she looked, a blind in one of the windows of the opposite house was lifted, and the window cautiously opened, while a head with a tangle of golden hair was thrust out, and a little voice — clear, like the sound of a thrush in a tree — sang in sweet dulcet tones some verses of a childish morning hymn: —

"Now the eastern sky is red,
I, too, lift my little head;
Now the lark sings loud and gay,
I, too, rise to praise and pray.

"Saviour, to Thy cottage home
Once the daylight used to come:
Thou hast often seen it break
Brightly o'er the Eastern lake.

"Blessed Jesus! Thou dost know
What of danger, joy, or woe,
Shall to-day my portion be —
Let me meet it all in Thee."

Here the sweet, clear voice broke off suddenly, for the child saw that her opposite neighbour on the doorstep was looking up at her.

"Mrs. Harrison," she said, nodding and kissing her hand. "*I see you! I'm coming down when I'm dressed. Uncle Bobo isn't awake yet.*"

Then the head disappeared, and there was silence for a few minutes.

Presently the bolts of the opposite door were gently drawn, and out came the daintiest little figure, in a fresh blue cotton frock and white pinafore, her rosy lips parted with a smile, and her eyes dancing with the light of the morning of life. Dear unclouded child-eyes! How soon they lose that first sweet innocent gaze! How soon the cares and sins of this weary world shadow their depths, and the frank gaze which tells of faith in all that is lovely and beautiful is changed into one of distrust, and sometimes of sorrow.

"Well, little Miss Joy!" Patience Harrison said, as the child tripped across the row, and flung her arms round the waiting mother's neck.

"Well, dear Goody Patience. Why are you sitting here all alone, and looking so sad? Why, Goody, *dear* Goody, you are crying!"

For the child's loving caress had touched the fountain of tears, and, sobbing, the poor mother said —

"Oh, little Miss Joy! Jack has run away. I couldn't sleep, so I came down here."

"Run away, Jack! Oh, how naughty of him to grieve you! But he will come back — of course he will. Don't cry, my dear Goody Patience; don't cry. Of course he'll come back. What was it all about?"

"A fuss with his poor Aunt Amelia, as usual; and Jack was rude, I know, and he did not behave well; but —"

"I am afraid," Joy said thoughtfully, "Jack is not a good boy to Miss Pinckney. He is no end good to *me*, and I love him dearly, and so does Uncle Bobo. He says he is like a fine ship — all sails set and flags flying and no compass — which gets on rocks and quicksands, because there is no guide. That is what Uncle Bobo says."

"It is quite true — quite true," Patience said. "I do not excuse him, though I know he has had a great deal to try his temper in his Aunt Amelia's house."

"I dare say he will come back, and be a good boy. I'll talk to him," Joy said, with a wise nod of her golden head. "I'll talk to him, and he will never run away again."

"But, Joy, he is gone; and though Mr. Paterson thinks he knows where to find him, I don't believe he *will* find him."

"I must go indoors now; for here is Peter coming to take down our shutters, and Uncle Bobo will be wanting his breakfast, and I always help Susan to get it ready. I shall be on the watch, and the minute Jack comes back I will run over."

Then, with showers of kisses on the pale, woe-struck face, little Miss Joy was gone.

CHAPTER II.

LITTLE MISS JOY

Little Miss Joy was the pride of the row, and always seemed to bring a ray of sunshine with her. She lived with an old man she called "Uncle Bobo," who kept a curiously mixed assortment of wares, in the little dark shop where he had lived, man and boy, for fifty years.

He was professedly a dealer in nautical instruments, the manufacture of which was carried on in Birmingham or Sheffield. Every now and then a large packing-case would excite the inhabitants of the row, as it was borne on one of the Yarmouth carts constructed on purpose for the convenience of passing through the rows, and dropped down with a tremendous thud on the pavement opposite Mr. Boyd's door.

No wheels but the wheels of these carts were ever heard in the row, unless it were a wheelbarrow or a truck. And none of these were welcome, as it was difficult for foot-passengers to pass if one of these vehicles stopped the way.

The nautical instruments by no means represented all Mr. Boyd's stock-in-trade. Compasses and aneroids and ship's lamps were the superior articles to be sold. But there were endless odds and ends – "curiosities" – bits of carving, two or three old figure-heads of ships, little ship-lanterns, and knives of all shapes and sizes, balls of twine, rolls of cable, and all packed into the narrow limits of the tiny shop.

"Uncle Bobo" was coming home one night – a Christmas night – a few years before the time my story opens, when he heard a wailing cry as he fitted the latch-key into his own door.

The cry attracted him, and looking down on the threshold of his home he saw – a bundle, as it seemed to him, tightly tied up in a handkerchief. Stooping to pick it up, the faint wailing cry was repeated, and Uncle Bobo nearly let the bundle fall.

"It's a child – it's an infant!" he exclaimed. "Where's it dropped from? Here, Susan!" he called to his faithful old servant, "here's a Christmas-box for you; look alive!"

Susan, who had appeared with a light, groped through the various articles in the shop, and received the bundle from her master's hand.

"Dear life, Mr. Boyd, what are you going to do with it then?"

"Can't say," was the answer, as Mr. Boyd rolled into the parlour, where a bright fire was burning and the kettle singing on the hob. "Unpack the parcel, Sue, and let's have a look."

Susan untied many knots and unrolled fold after fold of the long scarf-shawl of black and white check in which the child was wrapped: and then out came, like a butterfly out of a chrysalis, a little dainty girl of about two years old, who, looking up at Mr. Boyd, said, "Dad-da!"

There was no sign of ill-usage about the child. She was neatly dressed, and round her waist a purse was tied. Mr. Boyd fitted his large black-rimmed spectacles on his nose, and while Susan sat with the child on her knee, warming her pink toes in the ruddy blaze, he untied the ribbon with which the purse was fastened to the child's waist, and opened it.

It was an ordinary purse, with pockets, and within the centre one, fastened by a little spring, was one sovereign and a bit of paper, on which was written:

"It is the last money I have in the world Take care of the bearer till you hear more. Keep her for me."

Eight years had gone by since that Christmas night, and nothing more had ever been heard about this "Christmas-box;" but Uncle Bobo never repented that he had kept the child. She had been the interest and delight of his old age, and he had fondly called her "My little Joy."

The neighbours wondered a little, and some looked severely on this deed of kindness of Mr. Boyd's.

The person who looked most severely at it was Miss Amelia Pinckney, who kept a small haberdasher's and milliner's shop opposite Mr. Boyd's. Now neighbours in the Yarmouth rows, especially opposite neighbours, are very near neighbours indeed; and if it was almost possible to shake hands over the heads of the passers-by from the upper windows, it was quite possible to hear what was said, especially in summer, when the narrow casements were thrown open to admit what air was stirring.

Thus Miss Pinckney's voice, which was neither soft nor low, reached many ears in the near vicinity, and Mr. Boyd was well aware that she had called him "a foolish old fellow," adding that "the workhouse was the place for the child, and that she had no patience with his folly."

Truth to tell, Miss Pinckney had but little patience with any one. She had, as she conceived, done a noble deed by allowing her stepsister and her boy to take up their abode with her. But for this deed she took out very heavy interest; and poor Mrs. Harrison, who was, as her sister continually reminded her, "worse than a widow" – a deserted wife – had to pay dearly for the kindness which had been done her. Many a time she had determined to leave the uncongenial roof, and go forth to face the world alone; but then she was penniless, and although she worked, and worked hard too, to keep herself and her boy, by executing all Miss Pinckney's millinery orders, and acting also as general servant as well as shopwoman of the establishment, still she was never allowed to forget that she was under an obligation to her sister, and that she ought to be "thankful for all her mercies!"

"It is not as if it was only yourself, Patience. Think what it is to have a boy like yours! Enough to drive one mad, with his monkey tricks and his impudence. I don't say that I regret taking you in. Blood is thicker than water, and you are my poor father's child, though he had cause to rue the day he married your silly mother – he never had a day's peace after that."

Such sentiments, expressed with freedom and without intermission, were a trial in themselves; but lately things had assumed a far more serious aspect.

Jack had been a mere baby when first he and his mother had been taken in by Miss Pinckney. But eleven years had changed the baby of two years old into a strong, self-willed boy of thirteen, impatient of control, setting all his aunt's rules at defiance, and coming in from school every day, more antagonistic, and more determined, as he said, to "pay the old auntie back in her own coin."

In vain Mrs. Harrison had remonstrated; in vain she had striven to keep the peace. For ever before her eyes was the dread that Jack would carry his oft-repeated threat into execution, and go to sea. Then, indeed, the light of her stricken life would finally go from her, and she would have nothing left to live for!

Jack was a boy likely, in spite of all his faults, to fill a mother's heart with pride. He was the picture of merry, happy boyhood, with a high spirit, which was like a horse without a bridle, and carried him away beyond all bounds of tongue and temper. But to his mother he could be gentle and penitent, acknowledging his faults, and showing real sorrow at having grieved her by warfare with his aunt. There was an excellent boys' school in Yarmouth, where he made good progress with his lessons, and was a favourite with his school-fellows; and the master, though often irritated by his tricks and carelessness, found it hard to be angry with him, or to inflict the punishment he deserved.

It is possible that Jack would have been able to get on more peaceably at home, had there not been another person frequently at his aunt's home with whom he waged a perpetual warfare. This person was a tall, meagre-looking young man, a clerk in an Excise office, who made great profession of being better than his neighbours.

He was always coming into Miss Pinckney's to tea or supper, and invariably, when listening to the aunt's stories of Jack's misdemeanours, talked of the bad end to which naughty boys were brought, and of the sins of disobedience bringing their sure reward.

Mr. Skinner had the disagreeable habit of uttering truths in the most unpleasant manner. A great deal that he said was correct; but somehow his words seemed to have no effect on those whom

he addressed. There was a dash of unreality about Mr. Skinner, and a certain want of candour, which Jack's eyes were quick to detect.

He suspected that Mr. Skinner came to Miss Pinckney's "for what he could get," that he liked a chair by her fire in the back parlour, and that the glass of hot gin and water, sweetened to his taste, with a bit of lemon floating on the top, was his grand attraction.

The smell of this glass of spirit and water was odious to Jack; and he naturally felt aggrieved, when on one occasion Mr. Skinner, coming in to tea, devoured the whole plate of hot buttered toast or muffins, and talked of the duty of thankfulness, and how much more any of us had than we deserved – Jack meantime having slices of very stale bread scraped with a little salt butter. The contrast between his own share of the fare and Mr. Skinner's was sufficiently provoking. Then too of late Jack had been conscious that both Mr. Skinner and his aunt had been doing their best to bring his mother round to their view – that he was "the worse-behaved and most ill-conditioned boy that ever lived."

That last great outbreak of temper, when he had rushed off, and left his mother to pass a sleepless and tearful night, had been caused not so much by the shower of reproaches heaped on him, as by his aunt's bitter words: "If you go on like this, you'll break your mother's heart. Even she is getting sick of you, and you would be a good riddance!"

He knew well enough it was not true. He knew that if all the world were against him, his mother would never give him up. But, stung to the quick, he had poured out a torrent of angry words; and addressing his aunt as "an old cat, who shouldn't have the chance of setting her claws into him again!" he had rushed off and left his mother miserable.

As soon as the house was quiet and Miss Pinckney's long tirade against "spoilt wicked boys" had ceased, Patience Harrison had crept downstairs again, and, slipping the bolt off the door, had taken up her position there. And there George Paterson had found her, pale and worn with sleepless sorrow, and with an aching sense of loss which was well-nigh hopeless.

CHAPTER III.

"AN HONEST BOY."

When little Miss Joy had tripped across the row to her own door, Mrs. Harrison had gone into the house.

The shutters were being taken down from several of the windows, blinds were drawn up, doors opened, and the row was waking to life and the business of life.

Mrs. Harrison went about her usual work of clearing up and dusting and sweeping, and about half-past six she called a boy from one of the opposite houses to take down the shutters of the little shop front.

The boy looked wistfully at her sad face, and asked, "Is Jack ill, please, ma'am?"

"No, not ill," she answered, unwilling to spread the news that he had run away; "not ill; but I am up early."

The boy asked no further question, but said to himself, "Something is up; and here comes Mr. Paterson!"

"Have you found him?" Patience asked, under her breath. "Any news? Any news?"

George passed into the house, for he did not wish to excite observation.

"No – no direct news; but I hear some ships got under weigh about three o'clock. The tide served, and it is just likely that the boy is aboard one. Don't you think me unfeeling now if I say, it is just as well he should go; he may learn a lesson you couldn't teach him."

"The same story, the same trial over again! Oh, how can I bear it?" Patience said, in a voice that filled the honest heart of George Paterson with deep pity and almost deeper pain.

"Well," he said, "this wrangling here was bad for all parties. The boy was always in hot water."

"Because she was so cross-grained – because she hated him. Oh, I cannot, cannot bear to think of it!"

"Pray," said a sharp, shrill voice from the bottom step of the very narrow staircase which led into the still narrower passage, "pray, what is all this about?"

"Jack never came home last night," Patience said in a voice of repressed emotion. "He never came home. He is gone, and I shall never see him again."

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" was the reply. "Bad pennies always turn up. I never knew one in my life that was lost. Mark my words, you have not seen the last of him – worse luck."

"That's not a very pleasant way to talk, Miss Pinckney: you'll excuse me for saying so," said Mr. Paterson. "The boy was a good boy on the whole."

"A good boy!" Miss Pinckney was screaming now. "Well, George Paterson, your ideas of goodness and mine differ. You may please to take yourself off now, for I've no time to spend in gossip;" and Miss Pinckney began her operations by flapping with a duster the counter of the shop, and taking from the drawers certain boxes of small articles in which she dealt.

While she was thus engaged, she suddenly stopped short, and uttered an exclamation of horror, turning a white face to her sister, who was listening to the few words of comfort George had to bestow. "Look here!" she exclaimed; "look here! The secret's out. The little tin cash-box is gone, and the thief is out of reach. What do you say to your good boy now, eh, George Paterson?"

George Paterson took one step into the shop, and said —

"How do you know he took it? He is the last boy I could think of as a thief."

"Of course. Oh, he is a perfect boy – a good boy! I only wish he had never darkened my doors – the young villain!"

"Hush, now Miss Pinckney. Calm yourself, and let us have a look for the box. Where was it put?"

"Why, in the drawer, to be sure, under the counter. I keep the key of the drawer in my key basket. I always locked it – always. He got the key and opened it. There was four pounds and odd money in it – close on five pounds."

"I am certain," said Patience, "Jack did not steal your money, sister Amelia." Poor Patience was calm now. "It is impossible," she continued. "He was – he was as honest as the day, and as true as gold."

"All that's very fine – very fine indeed. He stole the money, and made off. If he didn't, who did?"

Patience stood wondering for a few moments, going over all that day – that last day. Jack had been at school and out till nearly tea-time; then he had sat with his books till supper; and then came the uproar with his aunt, and he had rushed away – straight out of the house. He could not have stopped in the shop on the way; besides, a plot must have been laid to get the key. It was impossible Jack could be guilty.

She looked at George, and read in his face deep sympathy, and also read there a reassuring smile.

"No," he said. "Whoever is the thief, Jack is innocent. Circumstances may be against him – his running off to sea, and his passion-fit against you – but I believe him to be innocent. You had better leave things as you found them, and I'll call in a policeman. There'll be one on his beat at the end of the row by this time. It is right and just all proper inquiries should be made."

The policeman – a stolid, sober individual, who never wasted words – came at George Paterson's bidding, and looked with a professional eye at the drawer whence the money had been abstracted.

"Box and all gone! That's queer. Key of box fastened to it by a string. Humph! Any servant in the house?"

"No."

"Boy that cleans up and takes down the shutters, eh?"

"No – that is – my nephew was in the house, and," said Miss Pinckney with emphasis, "he ran off to sea last night."

The policeman gave a prolonged "Ah!"

Then he proceeded to examine the lock of the drawer.

"Where's the key?"

"Here, in my key basket. I lock the drawer the last thing, and lock the shop-door myself. You know that, Patience. Speak up."

"Yes, I know it – I know it."

"Well, there seems no certain clue," the policeman said, twisting the key of the drawer round and round in the lock.

"There's this clue," Miss Pinckney said; "my nephew who ran off to sea stole the box. He and I had quarrelled a bit, for he was the most impudent and trying young vagabond. If you wish to know my thoughts, policeman, they are that he took the cash-box."

"There's no proof. We must have proof. But there's suspicion. We must try to track the youngster, find out what ship he sailed in; and when she comes into port, why, we'll keep an eye on the little chap."

The policeman had no more to say just then, and departed, saying to George, who shouldered his tools and followed him, "I know the boy. A sharp one, isn't he?"

"An honest one, if ever an honest boy lived," was the rejoinder, as George Paterson strode away.

CHAPTER IV. *HIS OWN WAY*

Jack Harrison had no fixed purpose when he rushed out of his aunt's house, except to get away from the sound of her angry words, and from the sight of his mother's grieved face – that face, which bore the marks of so many storms, and which he loved better than any other in the world.

"I had better go," he reasoned with himself. "I may make a fortune. Suppose I go aboard a whaling ship, as my father did. I won't go aboard a smack or trawler; I should not care for that life – handling fish, and out all weathers, north of the Dogger trawling – no, that would not pay, but a good ship would; and I'll take a look round the quay as soon as it's light."

Jack had found the convenient shelter of an old boat on the beach, and there he curled himself up and fell asleep.

He was awoke by feeling something touching his face, and starting up, just distinguished in the dim light the shape of a dog, which began to whine piteously, and licked his hands.

"What, are you lost, or run away like me?" he asked. "Have you been treated ill, eh?"

Jack was now thoroughly awake, and crept out of his shelter on to the soft sand, which almost gave way under his feet.

The dog continued whining and jumping on him, and seemed to want to show him the way to some place.

"What do ye want, eh? I can't make you out," Jack said; but in the light of the strengthening dawn which was breaking over the sea he saw a dark mass of something at some distance on the sand, and towards this the dog was evidently trying to guide him.

There was not a creature to be seen on the level strand, and no sound but the gentle murmur of the tide just turning. Presently, however, another sound made Jack pause and listen.

The dog heard it also, and grew more and more frantic in his efforts to lead Jack on.

When he got near the dark mass, Jack found it was the figure of a man, and that the sounds came from him, for he was groaning and crying as if in great pain. The dog ran to him, and leaping on his prostrate figure, and then back again to Jack, showed that the place to which he had to bring him was reached. As plainly as a dog could speak, he was saying, "Help my master."

Jack bent down over the man, and said —

"What's the matter? Are you hurt?"

"Yes, I've sprained my leg; and if I don't get to the quay by four o'clock I am ruined. I'm mate of the *Galatea*. Look alive and help me to the ship; it's all right when I'm there, for the captain is a jolly fellow – but oh, this leg! – all along of my catching my foot in a net. Toby here and I were coming along the beach from my old step-mother's, over t'other side of the Monument, and I fell, and must have twisted my foot as I fell on that big stone. Now, I say, will you help me to limp to the quay? Doubt if I can do it, but I'll try all the same."

The light was momentarily increasing now, and as Jack bent over the man to take his arm and pull him into a sitting posture, he saw a sad, pensive face turned up to him. Evidently the impression that was mentally made was a good one, for the man said —

"Where are you off to, young un?"

"To see if I can get aboard any ship, and work my passage."

"Whew! – oh! – here, wait a bit, my boy; I must ask the Lord to help me. I have been crying and groaning like a baby; that won't do. No, Dick Colley, you mustn't be a coward. Pain! well, what's pain! Toby there would bear it better!"

After a moment's silence the man said —

"Now, heave-to, my boy, and I'll put down the right leg, and make you answer for the left. Ahoy! ahoy!"

The "ahoy" was nearly a groan again, and then there was a muttered oath.

"Did ye hear that, boy? That's the hardest job a man has to do – to cure himself of cursing. It's worse than drinking. I've been hard at it for a twelvemonth now, and I'm blessed if I ain't beaten over and over again. This pain will – Don't you think, boy, I consider it a fine thing to swear, and take the Lord's name in vain. I think it is a shame to do it – and I beg Him to forgive me the next minute. It's just this – that habits, bad or good, stick like a leech. Now then, ahoy!"

This time Dick Colley was fairly on his feet, and by the support of Jack's strong shoulder progress towards the quay was made.

It was slow and difficult, and Toby followed close to his master's side with a dejected air, his stubby tail between his legs, giving every now and then a little whine of sympathy.

"I am hard put to it, lad, to get along. I am feeling faintish and bad; but I can't afford to lose this voyage; it's a long one, and good pay, and I've an old mother and a pack of children to keep."

"Rest a bit," said Jack. "Here's a post will do."

"Ay; I dare say I'm pretty near breaking your shoulder-blade. I shan't forget you, youngster. I say, what's up? mischief, eh?"

"I want to be off to sea just for a bit. Will you take me?"

"Well, I must go aboard first, before I can promise. Now then, on we go."

The quay was reached at last, and it was now broad daylight.

The stately ships were all getting under weigh, and there was no bustle or noise. The cargoes had been shipped overnight, and there was only a silent waiting for the tide.

"Here she is; here's my berth. You help me aboard, and we'll see what can be done."

"Dick Colley, the mate, as sure as I'm alive!" said one of the crew, who was turning a loose cable round and round into a coil of many circles. "Why, old chappie, what's amiss with 'ee?"

"Give us a hand aboard. I've been and sprained my ankle. This youngster helped me along, or I'd never have got here."

"You are just in time, mate; for we are off to the river's mouth in a twinkling. Here, why, look alive! he's awful bad."

With Jack's help they got Dick Colley on board and down below, where the ship's surgeon bandaged the swollen ankle, and Jack stood by with Toby.

In the general hurry of departure, when the captain gave the word, no one noticed Jack, or if they noticed him, concluded that he was aboard the *Galatea* as a passenger, of which there were a few.

It was not till they were well out to sea that the captain, coming down into the mate's berth, said —

"Hallo, Colley! who's the youngster aboard with the curly hair? What's he about?"

"He wants to work his way out, captain; set him to it. I promised I'd say a word for him. He just helped me across the sand, when I was pretty near dying of the pain. You'll let him stay?"

The captain turned on his heel, somewhat sulkily.

"Do you suppose he's to do the work of your lame foot, eh? Well, he hasn't come here to eat the bread of idleness. I'll soon show him that."

And the captain kept his word.

Long before the sun – which had risen in a cloudless sky that morning – had set behind a bank of clouds, Jack was put to work.

Washing the decks and performing other like offices fell to his share on that first bright day, when to sail over the blue calm sea, with the crisp air blowing from the great German Ocean, was a pleasant sensation in itself.

But night came on, and the stars looked down from their immeasurable depths; and Jack, lying on a bench, with his arms folded, and his face resting on them, had time to think.

He had done it now. Often, when in a storm of passion he had said he would leave his aunt's roof for ever, he had relented, and even at his mother's instigation and entreaty had expressed sorrow for his burst of anger, and asked to be forgiven.

He had done this only a fortnight before, and his aunt had received his apology with a short —

"It's all very well to think by saying you are sorry you make it all right. It's deeds not words, for me."

This ungracious manner of receiving an expression of contrition had often hardened the boy's heart against his aunt. Still more so when, from the other side of the parlour, Mr. Skinner would say, in a nasal, squeaky voice —

"It's a wonder to me how your kind, generous aunt puts up with you for a single hour. Only a good woman like her would give you house room at all."

"What business is it of yours, I should like to know?" had been Jack's retort; and all the real sorrow he had felt, awakened by his mother's gentle words, had vanished.

That Skinner! How he hated him; how instinctively he turned from him with positive dislike and loathing.

Now, as he lay alone and unnoticed beneath the star-strewn sky of the summer night, it was not of Skinner that he thought, not of his aunt, not of anything he had suffered — but of his mother.

And he had left her without a word — without a kiss! Many and many a time had he felt her kiss upon his forehead as he was sinking off into the sound sleep of childhood. Many a time he had heard her whispered prayer as she knelt by his side; and now he had left her desolate!

"Joy will be there," Jack thought — "little Miss Joy, and she will comfort her — dear little Joy!"

And somehow, as all these memories of those he had left behind him came before him, tears rose all unbidden, and chased each other down his cheeks.

Presently a rough kick from a man's boot made him start.

"The mate is singing out for you, youngster," he said; "get along with you and go where you are wanted, for you ain't wanted here."

"Where's the mate?"

"Where, stupid? In his berth, a groaning and sighing. There ain't much the matter with him, that's my belief; only some folks can afford to make a fuss."

Jack drew himself together and walked towards the companion ladder. As he was putting his foot on it with the cautious air of the uninitiated, a rude push from behind, followed by a derisive laugh, sent him down to the bottom with a heavy thud.

"Shame!" cried a voice, "to treat the boy like that."

"Oh, he will be one of Colley's lambs, canting no end, you'll see! For my own part, I'd soon chuck him overboard."

"I know you are spiteful enough for anything," was the reply; "and I pity that boy if he's in your clutches."

Another laugh, and Jack, now on his feet, turned round with a defiant air, and, half-stunned and bewildered, was climbing up the stairs again, to give his adversary a blow with his fist, when a voice called —

"Stop, lad! don't go and give evil for evil."

Colley from his berth had seen Jack fall, and had heard the mocking laugh.

"Come here, lad. I'm a bit easier now, and I want to talk to you. There, sit down on my locker, and we'll spin a yarn. You've run away, haven't you? I was so mad with pain, or I should have talked to you before. Come, you've run away now?"

"Yes," the boy said.

"Then you've been and acted very foolish, let me tell you. I did the same, boy, and I've repented it all my life. I grieved the best of old fathers by my wild career, and then I ran off; and when we put into port after the first voyage, I went to the old place to find him dead. Now, how do you think I felt?"

Why, ready to kill myself with remorse. What if you find your mother dead, when we put into port again? Now look here, boy. You've done me a good turn, and I'll do you one. I'll get the captain to put you ashore, if you choose, and I'll put a few shillings in your pocket to get back home. Do you hear?"

"Yes," Jack said, "I hear; but I am in for it now, and I had better stick to it. I should only make more trouble by going back. That old aunt, who made my life miserable, would only be worse than ever. No, sir, thank you; I'll go on, and I must put up with it."

"Lie on the bed you've made for yourself, lad? Ah, that's a precious uneasy one! I'd like to tell you how I made mine, and I will some day; but now you'd better turn in, there's the watch on deck, telling midnight."

"Where am I to turn in?" Jack asked.

"There's an empty hammock close by. Climb up there, and sleep till I call you. There isn't much sleep for me. Good-night."

Jack found it no easy matter to climb into the hammock. Like everything else, it requires practice; he took off his boots and made attempts to clamber up, but failed each time.

"You young cur, what are you about?" called a gruff voice. "Can't you turn in without waking a fellow from his sleep? Get along with you;" and a leg was thrust out, which gave Jack a very emphatic kick.

At last he gave up the attempt, and taking off his jacket he made a pillow of it, and curled himself up on the deck.

The motion of the ship began to be more decided, for just at dawn a fresh breeze sprung up, and the *Galatea* curtesied on the crest of the waves, and the water made a splash against her sides. Jack was rolled against a locker, and found sleep impossible.

The sailor who had grumbled at his disturbing him by his unsuccessful attempt to get into his berth, turned out at three o'clock, to relieve the watch on deck, and stumbling over Jack exclaimed —

"You baby bunting! So you can't get to your berth! I'll teach you!" And taking Jack roughly by one arm and leg, he tossed him as if he had been a feather into the hammock, and said —

"Lie there till you are wanted, and be thankful you've got there!"

There is a certain rule which I think has seldom an exception, though I know we say that all rules *have* an exception to prove their truth. But it is seldom indeed that we see the rule departed from, that "as a man soweth so shall he reap."

We all of us prove its truth at one time or other of our lives. "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption"; and many a bitter tear of self-reproach is caused by the crop our own hands have sown, when we took *our own way*, and turned from His way, "who gave us an example that we should follow in His steps."

CHAPTER V.

A TEA-PARTY IN THE ROW

The hot summer days passed by in the Row, and the inhabitants took advantage of the long evenings to go down to the beach and pier, and listen to the bands playing merry tunes, and watch the gaily-dressed people who frequent Yarmouth in the season.

Little Miss Joy was drooping somewhat with the heat, for the summer was one of rather unusual warmth. But though she was quieter, and her voice was not so often heard singing like a bird from her high window opposite Mrs. Harrison's, still she did not get dull or cross. "My Sunbeam!" her old friend called her; and there was nothing he liked better than to sit at his door, after business hours, while Joy talked to him or read him a story. She went to a little day-school in the market-place, and was, in old Mr. Boyd's opinion, a wonderful scholar.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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