Otis James

Off Santiago with Sampson

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CHAPTER I.
"KEEP OUT."

It was a small but by no means feeble-looking boy who stood in front of a driveway disclosed by the opening of huge gates which, until they had been swung inward, appeared to have been a portion of the high fence of boards.

There was seemingly no inducement for a boy to linger in this vicinity, unless, indeed, it might have been the sign posted either side the gate, on which was painted in letters rendered conspicuous because of the vivid colouring, the forbidding words, "Keep Out."

"I'll not keep out 'less I'm minded to, an' him as can hold me this side the fence needs to be spry on his feet," the small boy said, half to himself, and with a gesture of defiance which told he had not been accustomed to obeying commands that might be evaded.

Through the gateway nothing could be seen save enormous heaps of coal, some enclosed in pens formed of planks as if to prevent them from mingling with the others, and between

all a path or road of no more than sufficient width to permit the passage of a cart. In the distance, a rough building abruptly closed the view, and beyond it the puffing of steam and rattle of iron implements told of life and activity.

Outside the fence, it was as if this certain portion of the city had been temporarily deserted; but one could hear the rumble of wheels over the pavements on either hand, giving token that the coalyard was situated just beyond the line of city traffic.

The boy gazed into the uninviting-looking place as if fascinated, only glancing up now and then at the signs which mutely forbade his entrance, and, as if unconscious of his movements, stole slowly nearer and nearer the gateway until he stood directly on the line that separated the yard from the sidewalk.

"If I wanted to go in, it's more'n a couple of signs that could keep me out," he muttered, threateningly, and then, with one backward glance to assure himself that no unfriendly policeman was watching from the distance, the boy darted forward, taking refuge behind the nearest heap of coal, lest an enemy should be lurking near at hand.

Save for the hum of labour everywhere around, he heard nothing. No guardian of the smutty premises appeared to forbid his entrance, and after waiting a full minute to make certain it was safe to advance yet farther, he left one place of partial concealment for the next in his proposed line of march.

So far as he could see, there was no other guardian of the

yard save the two signs at the entrance, and the only purpose they served was to challenge him.

Grown bolder as the moments passed without bringing to light an enemy, the lad advanced more rapidly until he stood, partially concealed by one of the pens, where it was possible to have a full view of all that was being done in this place to which the public were not supposed to be admitted.

If the intruder had braved the unknown dangers of the yard simply in order to gratify his curiosity, then had he paid a higher price than the view warranted.

The building, which from the street appeared to mark the end of the enclosure, was a structure wherein puffing engines, grimy men, long lengths of moving chains, and enormous iron cars or boxes were sheltered from the sun or rain. In front of it a wooden wall extended down into the water, – a pier perhaps it might be called, – and at this pier, held fast by hemp and iron cables, lay a gigantic steamer built of iron.

The intruder gave no heed to the busy men and machinery within the building. The vessel, so powerful, but lying there apparently helpless, enchained his attention until he had made mental note of every spar, or boat, or cable within his range of vision.

Then, suddenly, from somewhere amid the chains, and cars, and puffing steam, came the shrill blast of a whistle, and as if by magic all activity ceased.

The engines no longer breathed with a heavy clank; cars and

chains came to a standstill, and men moved quietly away here or there as if having no more interest in the hurly-burly.

One of the weary labourers, his face begrimed with coal-dust until it was not possible to distinguish the colour of his skin, took from its near-by hiding-place a dinner-pail, and came directly toward where the small boy was overlooking the scene.

Within two yards of the lad the dusty man sat down, brushed the ends of his fingers on his trousers, rather from force of habit than with any idea of cleansing them, and without further delay began to eat his dinner.

The boy eyed him hungrily, looked around quickly to make certain that there were no others dangerously near, and stepped out from behind his screen of coal.

"You'd better keep an eye out for the watchman," the man said, speaking indistinctly because of the bread in his mouth, and the boy replied, defiantly:

"I'd like to see the watchman 'round here that I'm 'fraid of, an' besides, he couldn't catch me."

"What'er you doin' here?"

"Nothin'."

"A boy of your size has got no business to be loafin' 'round doin' nothin'."

"I might be eatin' if I had a chance; but there hasn't been much of an openin' for me in that line this quite a spell."

"Hungry?"

"Give me a piece of that bread an' I'll show yer."

"Don't you do anything for a livin'?" the man asked passing the lad a generous slice from the loaf.

"Course I do."

"What?"

"Anything that pays. I've sold papers some since the Spaniards got so funny; but it ain't any great snap, only once in awhile when the news is humpin' itself. A feller gets stuck mighty often, an' I'm thinkin' of tryin' somethin' else."

"Where's your folks?"

"I ain't got any to speak of now, since my father got giddy an' went off to war."

"Out for a soldier, eh?"

"Not a bit of it! He shovels coal aboard one of them big steamers that's down smashin' the life out'er Cuby, that's what he does, an' he's nobody's slouch, dad ain't!"

"What's your name?"

"Teddy Dunlap."

"Want more bread?"

The boy leaned over in order to look into the dinner-pail, and then said, promptly:

"I've had enough."

"Don't think you're robbin' me, 'cause you ain't. I believe in feedin' well, an' this is only my first pail. There's another over there that I'll tackle later."

Teddy glanced in the direction pointed out by his new acquaintance, and, seeing a pail half concealed by some loose

boards, at once stretched out his hand, as he said:

"If you've got plenty, I don't care if I do have another piece of that bread."

"Can't you earn enough to keep you in food?" and the man gave to the boy a most appetising sandwich.

"Say, that's a dandy! It's half meat, too! Them you get down-town don't have more'n the shadow of a ham bone inside the bread! Course I make enough to buy food; but you don't think I'm blowin' it all in jest for a spread, eh?"

"Runnin' a bank?"

"Well, it's kind'er like that; I'm puttin' it all away, so's to go down to Cuby an' look after the old man. He allers did need me, an' I can't see how he's been gettin' along alone."

"Where's your mother?"

"Died when I was a kid. Dad an' me boomed things in great shape till he got set on goin' to war, an' that broke it all up."

"Did he leave you behind to run wild?"

"Not much he didn't, 'cause he knows I can take care of myself; but he allowed to make money enough so's we could buy a place out in the country, where we'd have an imitation farm, an' live high. Oh, I'm all right, an' every time I catch a sucker like you there's jest so much more saved toward goin' down to Cuby. You see I never did take much stock in dad's kitin' 'round fightin' Spaniards, an' since he left it seems as if I was mighty foolish to let him go, so I'm bound to be where he is, when things come my way."

"Look here, Teddy," and the dust-begrimed man spoke in a more kindly tone to the boy, "If your father is a coal-passer in the navy, an' that's what he seems to be, 'cordin' to your story, you couldn't see very much of him, even though you was on board his vessel all the time."

"Don't yer s'pose I know that? I ain't sich a baby that I count on bein' right under his nose; but I'm goin' to be somewhere near the old man in case he needs me."

"It seems as if you might get down to Cuba easier than earnin' the money to pay your passage."

"How?" and Teddy ceased eating for the instant to look at this new friend who had made a suggestion which interested him more than anything else could have done.

"Why don't you try to work your passage? Now, here's this 'ere steamer, loadin' with coal for the navy – perhaps goin' to the very ship your father is on. If you could jolly the captain into takin' you to do odd jobs, it would be a snap, alongside of payin' for a ticket an' trustin' to luck after gettin' there."

"Well, say! That would be a great racket if it could be worked! Is it a dead sure thing that the steamer's bound for our war-vessels?"

"That's what, though it ain't to be said that she'll be goin' to the very craft your father's on. All I know is Uncle Sam has bought this coal, an' it's bein' taken out to our navy somewhere 'round Cuba."

"I don't reckon any but them what enlists can go aboard the

steamer, an' the snap can't be worked, for I've tried four times to get taken on as a sailor."

"But bless your heart, this 'ere craft is only a chartered collier."

"A what?"

"I mean she's only a freighter that Uncle Sam has hired to carry coal. You won't find enlisted men aboard of her."

"An' do you really think there's a chance for me?"

"I can't say as to that, lad; but I'd make a try for a berth aboard if my mind was set on goin' into that part of the world, which it ain't. The captain went below not ten minutes before the noon-whistle sounded, an' he's likely there this minute."

Teddy gazed inquiringly at this new acquaintance for an instant, as if suspicious that the man might be making sport of him, and then marched resolutely toward the end of the pier, with the half-eaten sandwich almost forgotten in his hand.

After perhaps five minutes had passed, he returned, looking disappointed, but not disheartened, and seating himself by the side of the owner of the two dinner-pails, resumed operations upon the sandwich.

"See the captain?"

"Yep."

"Didn't want a boy, eh?"

"Guess not; he said he'd give me two minutes to get out of the cabin, an' I thought perhaps I'd better go."

"Quite natural, lad, quite natural; I'd done the same thing myself. There couldn't have been any very great harm worked,

though, in askin' the question."

"It stirred him up considerable; but I guess he'll get over it without any very bad spell," Teddy said, grimly, and after a brief pause, added, reflectively, "It seems as though some men hated boys; I've seen them as would take a good deal of trouble to kick a feller if he stood the least little bit in the way, an' I never could understand it."

"Perhaps there's more'n you in the same box; a brute's a brute whether he be old or young, an' age always makes 'em worse. It's a pity, though, that you didn't strike one of the right kind, because if you're set on gettin' down where the fightin' is goin' on, this 'ere steamer would have been the safest way."

"Do you know when she's likely to leave?" Teddy asked, after a long pause, during which he had been gazing intently at the gilt letters, *Merrimac*, on the vessel's rail.

"Some time to-night, I reckon. We've been workin' night an' day at the loadin', an' it's said that she'll leave the dock within an hour after the last scoopful has been put aboard."

"How long will it take her to get there?"

"I can't say, lad, seein's I don't rightly know where she's bound; but it shouldn't be a long voyage at the worst, for such as her."

Again Teddy gazed at the gilt letters on the rail, as if in them he saw something strange or wonderful, and when the owner of the dinner-pails had come to an end of his meal, the boy said, abruptly:

"Do you know the watchman here?"

"Watchman! I haven't seen any yet, though I reckon likely there is one around somewhere; but he ain't agitatin' himself with doin' much watchin'."

"Is the yard open all the time?"

"I haven't seen the gates closed yet; but most likely that's because the work has been pushed on so fast, there hasn't been time to shut 'em. Look here, lad!" and now the man sat bolt upright, staring as intently at the boy as the latter had at the gilt letters, "Is it in your head to stow away on that steamer?"

"Sim Donovan did it aboard a English steamer, an' I've heard it said he had a great time."

"Yes, I reckon he did, if the captain was the usual sort," the dust-begrimed man replied, grimly.

"I could keep out of sight a whole week, if it was for the sake of comin' across dad," the boy added, half to himself.

"That's what you think now, lad; but it ain't the easy work you're countin' on. As a general rule, stowaways get it mighty tough, an' I'd sooner take my chances of swimmin', than to try any such plan."

"If a feller kept under cover he couldn't get into much trouble."

"But you can't stay in hidin' any great length of time, lad. You'd have to come out for food or water after a spell."

"Not if I took plenty with me," Teddy replied, in the tone of one who has already arrived at a conclusion.

"It looks easy enough while you're outside; but once shut in between decks, or cooped up in some small hole, an' you'd sing

a different tune."

"I wouldn't if it was a case of seein' dad when we got there."

"But that's the trouble, my boy. You don't know where the steamer is bound. She might be runnin' straight away from him, an' then what would you do?"

"You said she was goin' to carry the coal to our vessels, didn't you?"

"Yes; but that don't mean she'll strike the very one your father is workin' on."

"I'll take the chances," and now Teddy spoke very decidedly.

For an instant it was as if the owner of the two dinner-pails would attempt to dissuade him from the hastily formed determination, and then the man checked himself suddenly.

"I like to see a boy show that he's got some backbone to him, an' it may be you'll pull out all right. It'll be an experience you'll never forget, though, an' perhaps it won't do any harm."

"How can it?" Teddy asked, sharply.

"Them as have tried it might be able to explain more'n I can; there's no call for me to spend wind tryin' to tell what you won't listen to, so I'll hold my tongue. I'm bound to say this much, though, which is that you're certain to catch it rough when the time comes for showin' yourself."

"That'll be all right; I can stand a good deal for the sake of seein' the old man once more."

Having said this, Teddy turned his head away as if no longer inclined for conversation, whereupon the owner of the two

dinner-pails surveyed him admiringly.

"I wouldn't wonder if you had considerable sand in you, Teddy Dunlap," he said, musingly. "An' even though it seems a queer thing for a grown man to do, I'm minded to give you a lift along what's goin' to prove a mighty hard road."

"Meanin' that you're willin' to help me?" the lad asked, his face brightening wonderfully.

"It's little I can do, an' while I ought'er turn you over to the police in order to prevent your makin' a fool of yourself, I'll see the game out so far as I can. What have you got by way of an outfit?"

"I don't need any."

"You must have food and water."

"I ain't broke, an' it won't be any great job to buy as much grub as will keep me goin' for a spell."

"That's the same as all stowaways figger, an' the consequence is that they have to show themselves mighty soon after the ship sails. I ain't advisin' you to try the game; but if you're set on it, I says, says I, take all you'll need for a week, an' then perhaps there'll be a turn in affairs that'll help you out of a bad hole. Here are my pails; they're yours an' welcome. Fill 'em both with water, or perhaps cold tea would be best; buy whatever will be most fillin', an' walk aboard as bold as a lion within the next hour. Them as see you are bound to think you're waitin' upon some of the workmen, an' not a word will be said. The hidin' of yourself is easy enough; it's the comin' out that'll be rough."

"Say, you're what I call a dandy!" and Teddy laid his hand on the man's knee approvingly. "I was mighty lucky to come across one of your kind."

"I ain't so certain about that. Before twenty-four hours have gone by you may be wishin' you'd never seen me."

"I'll risk that part of it, an' if you really mean for me to have the pails, you'll see me go aboard the steamer mighty soon."

"They're yours, my boy, an' I only hope you'll come out of the scrape all right."

"Don't worry 'bout that; it'll be a terrible spry captain that can make me cry baby when I'm headin' toward where dad is. Be good to yourself!"

Teddy took up the pails, and as he turned to go out of the yard his new acquaintance asked, solicitously:

"Got money enough to buy what'll be needed? If you haven't there's some odd change about my clothes that – "

"I'm well fixed, an' that's a fact. Ever since the idea came to me of huntin' dad up, I've kept myself in shape to leave town on a hustle. You're mighty good, just the same."

"I'm makin' an old fool of myself, that's what I'm doin'," the man replied, angrily, and then turned resolutely away, muttering to himself, "It's little less than sheer cruelty to let a lad like him stow away on a collier. There ain't one chance in a thousand of his findin' the father he's after, an' the odds are in favour of his havin' a precious hard time before gettin' back to this town."

Then a whistle sounded as a warning that the labourers must

return to their tasks, and a moment later the building was alive once more with the hum and whir of machinery, the clanking of great chains, and the voices of men.

One of the steamer's hatches was already on and battened down. A second was being fastened in place, and the final preparations being made told that the enormous hold had been nearly filled with the black fuel needed by the war-ships.

Every man, whether a member of the vessel's crew, or one of the labourers employed for the lading, was intent only on his own business, and among all that throng it is probable that but one gave any heed to a small boy who came rapidly down through the yard carrying two tin pails in his hands, and a large paper parcel under his arm.

That single workman, who was giving heed to other than his own special work, nodded in the most friendly fashion as the lad passed near where he was standing, and whispered, gruffly:

"God love you, lad!"

The boy winked gravely, and then, setting his face seaward, marched boldly up on the steamer's deck, glancing neither to the right nor the left, lest it should be observed that he was not familiar with his surroundings.

The man, who a few moments previous had been the possessor of two dinner-pails, watched carefully as the small lad walked rapidly forward, and only when the latter was lost to view did he give heed to his own work, saying half to himself as he took up the task once more:

"I've half a mind to blow on the boy even now, for it's a cruel shame to let him take the chances of stowin' away with but little hope of ever findin' his father."

As if in pursuance of this thought he took a step forward, and then checked himself, adding, thoughtfully:

"It would be more cruel to stop the little shaver just when he believes he's workin' his plan so smooth. Better let him go his own course, an' trust that them he comes across will remember the time when they were lads."

CHAPTER II.
KEEP IN

Teddy Dunlap's father was formerly a coal-passer on a steam-tug, and many times had the lad, while spending the day with his parent, seen an ocean-going steamer at close range, while the small craft went alongside the larger one for business purposes.

At such times the boy seldom lost an opportunity of boarding the big vessel, and thus it was that he had a general idea of where he might the most readily find a hiding-place this day when he was venturing so much in the hope of meeting his only relative.

The dinner-pails and the parcel under his arm would have done much toward warding off suspicion as to his purpose, had any one observed him; but every person on deck, whether member of the crew or temporarily employed to make the ship ready for sea, was so intent on his duties as to have no thought for a lad who appeared to be attending strictly to his own business.

Even if any one aboard had observed Teddy particularly, the natural thought would have been that he had come to deliver the parcel and pails to one of the workmen, and so long as the boy had been permitted to come over the rail, it was reasonable to suppose he had due authority for being there.

Teddy knew full well that his chances for successfully stowing away in the vicinity of the main cabin, the engine-room, or

the deck-houses, were exceedingly slight, for such places were visited by many; but down in the very eyes of the ship, where were located the quarters for the seamen, was more than one dark, out-of-the-way hole into which he could creep with but little fear of being discovered.

Turning his head neither to the right nor the left, and moving rapidly as if it was his desire to be ashore again as soon as possible, the boy went into the forecastle – the sailors' parlour.

The dark, ill-ventilated place, filled with noisome odours, had at that moment no living occupants save the rats who had grown bold through long tenancy. The crew were all on deck, for at this time, when quick despatch was necessary, no skulking would be allowed, and had Teddy's friend with the dinner-pails attended to the arrangements, the boy could not have had a better opportunity.

He might be even boisterously noisy, and there was little likelihood any would come to learn the cause of the uproar until after the steamer had left the coal-sheds to begin her long voyage straight toward the enemy's islands.

Being in a certain degree aware of this last fact, Teddy set about making his arrangements for the ticketless voyage in a methodical fashion, there being no reason why he should allow himself to be hurried.

The crew on board the good steamer *Merrimac* had neither better nor worse quarters than those to be found on any other craft of her class; but to a lad whose experiences of seafaring

life had been confined to short excursions around the harbour, this "sea parlour" was by no means inviting, and save for the incentive which urged him forward, Teddy Dunlap might have allowed himself to become disheartened even before it had been proven that he could take passage secretly.

"It ain't so *awful* tough," he said to himself, "an' daddy will be all the more glad to see me after knowin' I've had a hard time gettin' to him."

This last thought was sufficient to strengthen his failing courage, and straightway he set about searching for a hiding-place where he might remain concealed until the steamer should come alongside Commodore Schley's flag-ship, the *Brooklyn*, whereon was his father.

Then – but there would be time enough to form plans for showing himself when he had nothing better with which to occupy his attention.

The forecastle was well filled with sea-chests, bedding, which as yet had not been put in place, and such like goods as seamen would naturally bring with them on a reasonably long voyage, therefore Teddy found it difficult to judge as to what might be the general arrangements for stowage after the steamer should be under way; but he had good reason to believe it was necessary to find some place so small that it could not well be utilised by the men.

When, after some search, he came upon a narrow, dark, doorless closet, partially filled with coils of rope, bolts of canvas,

and what appeared to be a general assortment of odds and ends, it seemed as if he had indeed found that for which he was looking.

There was little chance this small den would be required for other than what it was then used, and he had only to fear that some of the articles it contained might suddenly be needed, when he must of a necessity be discovered by whosoever should be sent to overhaul the goods.

"I'll have to take the chances," Teddy said to himself, having considered well this possibility of discovery. "It ain't likely they'll want anything out of here till after the steamer is at sea, an' then it'll be too late to send me ashore."

Once having decided that this was to be his abiding-place during the time he could remain in hiding on board the *Merrimac*, Teddy set about making such bestowal of the goods as would best serve to his comfort, arguing with himself that he might not have another opportunity for putting the new quarters into decent shape.

Understanding that once the steamer was at sea she would be tossed about by the waves until it might be difficult for him to remain in whatever place he pleased, the boy's first care was to make of the rope and canvas a barricade to hold the remainder of the goods in proper position, and, this done, there was little else possible, save to unroll a bolt of the sail-cloth that it should serve as a bed.

"It's a good deal snugger than I expected, an' the dark part of it don't count," he said to himself, contentedly, as he wedged the

two tin pails filled with water, and his store of provisions, inside the largest coil of rope. "When there ain't too much noise I can hear the crew talkin', and that'll help out big if a feller happens to get lonesome. Them signs on the coal-yard said 'keep out,' an' I come in; now I ought'er put up one that says 'keep in,' an' perhaps I'll go out quicker'n I'm countin' on. Anyhow it's a case of keepin' in mighty snug, 'less I want to run up against that captain once more, an' I'm thinkin' he'd be an ugly customer."

Teddy Dunlap was well content. He believed his store of provisions and water was sufficient to keep both hunger and thirst at a distance during such time as it might be necessary for him to remain there in hiding, and when the short term of imprisonment should come to an end, he would be with his father.

What more could any twelve-year-old boy ask for?

It was while counting up his reasons for being thankful that the stowaway fell asleep, the heat, the darkness, and the comparative quiet all contributing to make his eyelids heavy, and he was yet unconscious when two noisy, bustling little tugs, one either side of the big vessel, towed her down the harbour.

The voyage had begun, and, apparently, there was no suspicion in the minds of the officers that the *Merrimac* had on board other than her regularly shipped crew.

When Teddy awakened he felt comfortable both in mind and body; the steamer was rising and falling on the ocean swell, but not to such a degree as inconvenienced him in the slightest, and the many odours with which his nostrils were assailed passed

almost entirely unnoticed.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.