

Upward Allen

# Athelstane Ford



Allen Upward  
**Athelstane Ford**

«Public Domain»

**Upward A.**

Athelstane Ford / A. Upward — «Public Domain»,

# Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	10
CHAPTER III	15
CHAPTER IV	20
CHAPTER V	25
CHAPTER VI	30
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	34

# Allen Upward

## Athelstane Ford

### CHAPTER I

#### *COUSIN RUPERT GAINS A RECRUIT*

It has not happened to many men, as I think, to have fallen into the hands of as cruel and bloodthirsty a monster as ever defiled God's earth, and to have escaped to tell the tale. Yet it is of this that I have come to write; and of all the hardships and perils which I went through from the time I fled from my father's house to seek for treasure in the East Indies; and of the battles in which I fought; and of the madness of love and jealousy which I knew; and of how the man I trusted became my enemy, and pursued me with his vengeance; and of the treasure which I found in the palace of the Hindoo king; and of how I returned at last to my own home.

Nor do I greatly expect that the hearing of these things will be effectual to hinder those who come after me from adventuring in their turn, for young blood will have its way, like sap in the veins of a growing tree. But there are times when I think that if I could have looked forward and seen what was to come, and all the dire straits through which I was to pass – both among my own countrymen and in those distant lands – I might have given a different welcome to my cousin Rupert when he came riding into Brandon, on the evening of that day which was to be the last of my boyhood.

I had come out of the house before supper was laid, as I often used, and had made my way along the edge of the dyke which runs through our meadows into the broad, which we call Breydon Water; and there by the margin of the broad I stood, while the sun was setting behind me, and watched the light flush and fade over the grey spire and high red roofs of Yarmouth town. Many a night I had come there to the same spot and gazed with wistful eyes at that prospect; for though I was, in a manner, familiar with the old town, and had gone in there on market days many a time since I was a boy, yet, at this hour, and seen across the water in the bright blaze of the sunset, it seemed to be strangely removed and glorified – like that city which Christian had a prospect of from the Delectable Mountains – and I could never think of it as other than an enchanted region, the gate of the great world, where the hours throbbed with action, and life was more full and splendid than in our lonely grange among the broads; and my heart was fretted within me, and day by day the longing grew upon me to break out of the narrow limits in which my life was bound, and take my way thither into the glamour and the mystery of the world.

Then all at once, as I stood there and gazed, I was aware of the sound of a horse's hoofs coming over the wet grass, and turned and saw my cousin riding towards me on his black mare and waving his whip to me as he came.

I had a great affection for my cousin in those days, mingled with a sort of dreadful admiration for the character he bore. He was my elder by nearly ten years, and had been, in my eyes, a man ever since I was a child, so that I looked up to him with reverence, and thought nothing so delightful as to have him come down, bringing the air and rumour of the outside world into our quiet homestead. Indeed, he seemed to be of a superior order to us, and might almost be reckoned as one of the gentry, for his father came of the Gurneys of Lynn, and had set up a great brewery of ale there, by which he enriched himself past all counting. How such a man had come to marry my aunt I never knew, for my father kept silence on the subject, and Rupert himself could tell me nothing of his mother, who had died when he was but an infant. Nor was there much intercourse between our families, except that twice a year, at Lady-day and Christmas, Mr. Gurney would send us a barrel of his best brewing;

and once a year, on the 1st of January – for he would give no countenance to the feasts of the Church – my father despatched a pair of fine turkeys to Lynn.

Cousin Rupert always showed a friendship for us, and I believe would have given us his company more often but for my father's disapproval of his manner of life; for he was already known as a wild companion, and one who set little store by religion and respectability. There was even a scandalous report that he had been fined by the Aldermen of Yarmouth under the new statute made against profane swearing. They had fixed his fine, so it was said, at two shillings, being the penalty for common persons above the degree of a day labourer; but my cousin Rupert, taking out his purse with a great air, demanded to have his oath assessed like a gentleman's, and paid down a silver crown upon the table.

Since then he had been away beyond seas, nor had I set eyes on him for the best part of three years. It was thought that he had been taking some part in the wars which then raged all over Europe; and difficult enough it was to understand what they were all about, and whom we were fighting; for at one time we were on the side of the great Empress Maria Theresa, and against the young King of Prussia, who was dubbed an infidel; and then later on we were fighting against the Empress – it is true she was a Papist – and King Frederic was in all men's mouths as the Protestant hero: I remember myself seeing his portrait painted up on the sign-board of the inn at Blundell. However, we were always against the French, whatever happened.

But, as it turned out, all this had no concern with my cousin. I cannot tell how glad I was to see him back again, and I think he was not ill-pleased at seeing me.

“Hallo, is that young Athelstane!” he called out as soon as he was near enough. “Come on with me, cousin, and help me to put up my horse. I have ridden out from Yarmouth, and I mean to sleep here to-night.”

He sounded his words in the mincing, London fashion, which was then beginning to spread among the better class in Norfolk; but I cannot imitate his speech, and so write it down as if it were plain English.

Quick as my feet could carry me I ran forward in front of the horse, and was there with the gate of the yard open before my cousin came up.

My father turned out of doors at the clatter, and looked not over pleased when he caught sight of Rupert's dark face. However, he was a man who would never shut the door against his own blood, and he gave him some sort of a friendly greeting.

“Well, Nephew Rupert, how long have you been back in England?” he asked him, as soon as the horse had been taken in and given its feed.

“It is scarce a month since I landed,” my cousin answered; “but being in Yarmouth, and you so near, I could not forbear riding over to spend a night with you.”

By this time we were come into the house, and my mother was in the hall to welcome him, which she did with great kindness; for though he was not of her kin, I believe she loved him better than my father did. But that is saying little, for who was there about her that she did not love? Even those who held aloof from my father as a stubborn Independent had a kindness for my mother, who seemed to understand nought of differences in religion, except between Christian and heathen.

My father was of a different stamp. It was his boast that he was related to the family of the famous John Bradshaw, the judge who pronounced sentence on King Charles I, and whose house stands on Yarmouth quay to this day. My father has many a time pointed it out to me, and told me of the secret conclave held there of the Independent leaders, when it was resolved to bring the unfortunate king to the block. I have often thought that it was well for us that my father was a freeholder, owning the fee simple of Brandon Farm; for the gentry around were now all become staunch Churchmen, though loyal to King George II, and showing no favour to the young Pretender in his late desperate rebellion. Of that, however, I remember little, being scarce twelve years old when it occurred.

With the Rector of Brandon parish we held scant intercourse, except at tithing time, when my father always received him with grim civility and bade him take what the law gave him, since title from the Gospel he had none. Our only friend in the neighbourhood was one Abner Thurstan, a farmer who lived over the border in Blundell parish; but as he was an Anabaptist – or Baptist as they were then beginning to call themselves – and my father had a great contempt and dislike for the visionary ideas of that sect, even he came but seldom to our house. His daughter Patience was a great favourite with my mother; and for that matter I did not dislike the child, and would oftentimes pluck her an apple from our trees or cut a whistle for her out of a twig of elder wood.

The man whom my father most held in esteem was Mr. Peter Walpole, a wool factor of Norwich, and a very religious man. He had a great gift in the expounding of Scripture and in prayer, and it was his custom once in every month to ride over to our house from Norwich of a Saturday and hold a service on the next day for such as chose to come. This was before the Methodists had arisen in our parts, and there was no other means of hearing the Gospel in country places, the Church clergy being for the most part men of the world.

Lest I seem to be wandering from my story, let me say here that my father had been in treaty with this Mr. Peter Walpole concerning my apprenticeship to him in Norwich. After moping a long time at the dullness of my life in Brandon I had plucked up courage to tell my father that I would fain be abroad. He heard me less unkindly than I had feared, and contrived this plan for settling me away from home for a few years, after which, he was pleased to say, I might have sense enough to wish to come back. Good Mr. Walpole came into the scheme very readily, and I believe it was only a matter of fifty pounds between them before the thing could be carried out; but each held firmly to his own view of the bargain, and though there was the same friendship between them as ever, and Mr. Walpole prayed over the business in our house, they could by no means come to terms.

Things stood at this pass, and I was sorely impatient with it all, when, as I have said, my cousin Rupert arrived, and, for good or evil, gave my life a far different turn.

As soon as my father had seen to it that the cloth was laid for four, and sent down the maid with orders to fill a jug from the barrel on the right-hand side of the cellar door, he turned to Rupert.

“You shall taste your father’s brewing,” he said. “I trust all is well with him?”

“I have no doubt it is, and I am much obliged to you, sir,” answered he carelessly. “To tell you the truth, I have not yet found my way to Lynn.”

“What, nephew! Have you come here before paying your respects to your own father?”

“I am afraid it is even so; and I will not pay you so poor a compliment as to remark that Brandon Grange lies forty miles nearer to Yarmouth than King’s Lynn.”

“Fie, young man, I am ashamed to hear you! I doubt whether I ought to have let you cross my threshold if I had known of this. Jessica,” he added, turning to my mother, “here is a youth who comes to pay you a visit before he has so much as set eyes on Lynn brewery, after three years!”

And thrice during the evening he returned to the same subject, each time rating master Rupert soundly for his filial neglect, and pointing out the many advantages which his father’s rich house at Lynn had over what it pleased him to call the homely grange of Brandon.

He questioned Rupert while we supped concerning his adventures, and what quarter of the world he had been in. But as to this my cousin maintained a singular reserve, merely stating that he had spent most of the time on a voyage round the Cape of Good Hope to the factories of the great East India Company, of Leadenhall Street in the City of London.

All this time I listened, saying nothing, for it was not my father’s custom to permit me to speak in his presence, unless I was first questioned. I cared for this the less because I knew that as soon as we were upstairs together my cousin would unburden himself to me freely. And already I scented some mystery under his guarded speech, which made me impatient for the time when we should be alone. I listened with an ill grace to the chapter which my father read to the household after supper, and it seemed to me that he had never prayed at such length and to so little purpose. I thought it

especially needless that he should petition, for the space of full five minutes, for the fruitfulness of our flocks, for by this time the ewes had all dropped their lambs, and not one of them was a weakling.

Nevertheless it was over at last, and I quickly lighted the candle and conducted my cousin upstairs. He was always my bedfellow on the occasions of his visits to Brandon, and never spared to keep me awake as long as it pleased him to talk to me.

As soon as we were snugly settled in bed, Rupert, as I had expected, laid aside his reserve.

“Now, Cousin Athelstane, what do you suppose it is that has brought me here?”

I could only shake my head in sign of pure ignorance.

“I will tell you. I have come here to offer you a berth on board my ship, the *Fair Maid*, now lying in Yarmouth river.”

My breath was fairly taken away by this announcement. All the dreams I had cherished for so long seemed suddenly to have put on substance, and what was yesterday a thousand miles away had come at one word within my reach. Yet I could only stammer out —

“The *Fair Maid*? Is that the ship in which you went to the East Indies? And is she bound thither again?”

Rupert nodded his head.

“She sails as soon as ever she can be fitted out, and we are shipping the bravest fellows in all Norfolk for our crew. A word in your ear, cousin: we sail with letters of marque against the Frenchmen, and it will go hard if you or I come back with less than a thousand pounds to our share.”

“What! Is the *Fair Maid* a privateer?”

I spoke in some dismay, for in those days privateers bore a bad name. They were commissioned only to prey upon the commerce of such countries as we were at war with, but it was currently believed that they did not always look too closely at the flag of a vessel which fell in their way, and that if peace was proclaimed while they were abroad on a cruise they took care not to hear of it till such time as suited their convenience. Among good men, therefore, they were esteemed little better than pirates, and I could understand why my cousin had been so chary in speaking about his voyage to my father.

“You needn’t look so scared, youngster,” he said, noting my behaviour. “Our commission was signed by his Majesty King George himself; and even the Frenchmen we took had nothing to complain of beyond the loss of their property, and occasionally their lives when we found that necessary to our own safety.”

I felt my flesh creep, and yet the fascination of it was stronger than the dread.

“You mean you killed them?” I asked, gazing into his face as if I had never seen it before.

“We had to, sometimes, lest they should tell tales against us. Off Mauritius we were chased more than once by a sloop of war, and it would have gone hard with us if we had been captured. The French there have got a devil of a governor, La Bourdonnais, and he has vessels perpetually prowling up and down in those seas, and as far as Pondicherry and Chandernagore. But what do you say, cousin? Are you man enough to join us? You have the right stuff in you, I warrant — all the Fords have. Our great-grandfather fought at Naseby, and though he was a scurvy Roundhead, I’ll swear he gave a good account of himself.”

I hesitated, my whole heart on fire to accept, and yet held back by a subtle distrust for which I could in no way account.

“Come, boy, you have only to slip away to-morrow night, after I have gone, and join me privately in Yarmouth, at the sign of the ‘Three-decker.’ I will tell my worthy uncle in the morning that I am on my way to East Dereham and Lynn, so it will be long enough before they suspect where you are gone. And by the time the hue and cry reaches Yarmouth you shall be safely stowed in the hold of the *Fair Maid*, or maybe in a snug attic of the tavern, where only a bird could find you out.”

I made little more ado, but gave my consent, whereupon my cousin, reaching down to the pocket of his breeches which he had cast on the foot of the bed, drew out a golden guinea, which he pressed into my hand.

“Here is handsel for your engagement,” he said. And that settled, he turned over and betook himself to sleep, leaving me to get out of bed and extinguish the light.

But I could not sleep so easily, and lay there tossing and turning far into the night, while I speculated on the new life that lay before me and all the great deeds I would do.

## CHAPTER II

### *THE TAVERN OF THE “THREE-DECKER”*

Early in the morning after breakfast Cousin Rupert left us, giving out, as he had promised, that he was on the way to see his father at Lynn. And as he told me afterwards, he kept his horse on that road till he had passed through the village, when he turned, and skirting the river as far as Raynham ferry, crossed it there, and so rode into Yarmouth.

All that day I went about with a strange lightness in my breast, so that I could scarce keep from laughing out. And when my father admonished me, pretty roughly, for not having mended the fence of the fowl walk to his liking, I minded it no more than if it had been old Sugden the rat-catcher. Once or twice during the dinner I caught my mother looking at me with a certain apprehension, as if she observed somewhat unusual in my behaviour. I fancy she thought I might be sickening for the ague, which was very rife in those parts. My mother was a great physician, and always kept ready a store of the Jesuits' bark – the only good thing, my father was accustomed to say, that had ever come out of Rome.

In the afternoon I walked into Blundell to bid a sort of farewell to little Patience Thurstan. I found her set on a stool in the porch, threading beads, for she was but a child; and to see her jump up when I drew nigh, and run to meet me, was a pleasant sight to carry away in my memory through the stormy days which were to follow.

Knowing her to be faithful, from her behaviour in many a childish confidence we had had together, I made no scruple to tell her I was leaving Brandon; though I forbore to say whither I was bound, lest they should torment the girl with questions afterwards. And I knew that Patience would not tell a lie, and deny the knowledge if she possessed it. But I half repented what I had done when the poor little thing fell a-crying, and besought me not to go away. I had nothing else to bestow upon her, so I was forced to give her my cousin Rupert's guinea for a keepsake, telling her to buy a doll or a ribbon with it next time she went into Norwich fair.

With that I came away, beginning for the first time to feel how serious was the step I contemplated. But I had given my word, and I could not now draw back even if I had felt inclined.

The chapter my father read to us that night, I remember well, was out of the book of Ezekiel, in which the prophet dealt with the city of Tyrus, and denounced the judgments of the Lord on her pride and luxury, on her ships of fir and cedar with sails of purple embroidery, on her mariners and men of war, on her merchandise of silver and brass, of horses and mules, of ebony and precious stones, and of honey and oil and wine and spices and white wool. And the words sounded in my ear like a denunciation of the places I had chosen to go among; and I was glad when it was all over; and I went upstairs to my bedroom, hearing my father shoot the great bolts of the house door for the last time.

I made shift to take off my coat and shoes, and got into the bed, lest my mother should come in to bid me good-night, as she sometimes did. And well it was that I had thought of this, for in her anxiety about me she followed me up soon after with a dose of the Jesuits' bark, which she compelled me to swallow, though sorely against my will. Then she sat down by the bedside for the space of, I daresay, fifteen minutes, or longer as it seemed to me then, and fell to stroking my hair, which I wore without a queue, my father setting his face against that French fashion.

I fidgetted so much that at length my mother perceived that I would be alone. I heard her draw a sigh as she rose to go away, and then, tucking the bedclothes round me with great care, she gave me a kiss and left me.

I waited as long as I could contain my impatience, for my parents to fall asleep. Then I arose softly, without rekindling the light, which my mother had blown out, completed my dress, and filled a small knapsack with such few things as I had immediate need for. I remembered also to put in my

pocket a bright guinea which good Mr. Walpole had presented me with in my twelfth year as a reward for having repeated the 119th Psalm, and which my father had strictly forbidden me to spend.

Thus provided, I opened the door of my bedroom and crept out, carrying my shoes in my hand. I crossed the landing, treading like a thief, to the door of the room where my parents slept, and laid my lips against the panel that was nearest to my mother's side. And with that I found my eyes were smarting, and a lump rose in my throat, so that I turned away hastily, and made the best of my way down the stairs, and by unbarring the kitchen door, out into the open air. Then I turned my back on the house where I was born, and set out to walk through the night to Yarmouth.

Lest my father should surmise where I was, I had got ready a feigned letter in which I pretended – I am ashamed to say so – that seeing no likelihood of Mr. Walpole's receiving me without that extra fifty pounds which stuck so in my father's gizzard, I had taken the resolution of going up to London to seek my fortune; and I promised to send him news as soon as I should arrive there; which promise, as it turned out, I had no opportunity of keeping or breaking, for I did not set foot in that great city until years had passed, and I had gone through the wonderful adventures which were to make a man of me, and had come thither as the messenger of the second greatest Englishman, as I think, who has lived in my time; aye, and had speech of him who was the greatest of all. But of this hereafter.

The clammy air of the marshes clung about me and chilled my spirits, as I proceeded through the desolate region which lay between me and the town. The road hereabouts runs straight along for miles, without hedge or fence, save for a couple of upright posts, with three or four crossbars, rising up here and there at the corners of the fields where the dykes run into one another. A hundred years before all this part of Norfolk had been little better than a fen, which the Brandon Water overflowed at spring tides, till engineers had come over to us from Holland, who taught us to make these dykes and embankments after the fashion of their country. And, indeed, the people of Bury have a tradition that the ocean itself once came up over these parts, and that their hamlet, however since decayed, was then a flourishing town and seaport; but I could never find that any one outside of Bury believed in this legend.

Be that as it may, I had but a doleful walk of it; moreover, I was fain to button up my coat and pull my collar close about my neck, by reason of the cutting wind which blew across from the German seas. Nor did I meet any adventure on the way, but in avoiding the turnpike at Broxall I was forced to leap a dyke in the dark, and missing the further bank by about a foot, I fell into the water knee-deep. I got a sound drenching, but no other damage except for the mud bespattering my clothes, which must have presented a sorry spectacle had there been any there to observe me.

The noise of my splash brought out the pike-man, uttering many oaths, to see who it was that had been defrauding his gate. But I got nimbly on to my legs and ran past, and though he made a show of chasing me for a short space, he soon thought better of it, and went back to his bed.

It must have been, I suppose, half-way between midnight and dawn when I arrived in Yarmouth. And well pleased I was when I had safely crossed the bridge across the Bure river and felt the pavement of the town underneath my feet. For though there was not another soul abroad in the streets at that hour, that I could perceive, yet the knowledge that the houses on either hand were full of sleeping folks seemed to be some company after the desolateness I had just come through.

I had never before been in a great town at night, and I was much amazed by the splendour of the illumination from the lamps which hung across the high streets, and made almost as much brightness as if there had been a moon. Being somewhat afraid of meeting with the watch, for I did not then know the habits of these gentry as well as I did afterwards, I soon left the region of the lights, and turned down into the lanes, which the men of Yarmouth call rows, and of which they are not a little proud, and to my mind with some warrant, for, though strait, these passages are very regularly built, and beautifully paved with cobblestones, and are besides so numerous that I have never seen the like in any city I have visited, neither in Europe nor in the Indies.

In the end I got out from among the houses, and arrived upon the sea-beach, where I discovered a sheltered pit among the sand hillocks, which they call denes, and there I lay down and slept off my weariness.

When I awoke the sun was so far up that I judged it to be nearly nine o'clock. Taking shame that I had proved such a sluggard, I rose up quickly, and brushed away the sand, which I was rejoiced to perceive had finely cleansed away the mud from the dyke at Broxall. This done I made the best of my way into the town to keep my rendezvous with Cousin Rupert, for I was sharply beset by hunger.

I had to ask my way more than once before I could find out the tavern, which lay down on the quay, over against the river Yare. By this I soon saw that the "Three-decker" had a reputation not over and above savoury among the townsfolk, for the more respectable of those I addressed myself to gave me harsh looks before answering my question. And no doubt the soberness of my dress and carriage must have made it seem strange that I should be seeking the whereabouts of such a haunt.

I will not deny that this observation a little daunted me when I found myself at the door of the house. The tavern was by way of being an ancient one, for the oak props were blackened with age and the upper storeys jutted out one above the other, in the way our forefathers were used to build in walled towns, where every foot of space was of account. Nor did the place look to be ill-kept, though situated in a mean part of the town beside the fish market. However, it was no time for me to make reflections, having come so far, wherefore I quickly drew the latch and stepped inside.

I had no need of a guide to conduct me to the parlour, for I caught a hubbub of voices coming from my right hand, above which rose a roaring stave in chorus, interspersed with a clapping of hands and a rapping of mugs upon the table. I undid the door, meaning to slip in quietly, but no sooner did I pass my head into the room than the entertainment suddenly ceased, and the whole crew turned to observe my entrance.

Truly it was easier for them to discern me than for me to do the same by them, for besides the dismay of meeting so many faces at once, the whole room was filled with the smoke of tobacco, a thing which was strange to me, and which caused my eyes to tingle, besides tempting me to cough. I made out, however, that there was at least a score of men present, the most part of them seated round a table in the middle of the room, at the head of which table stood a high arm-chair, and in it, as I believe, the biggest man I had ever seen. The looks of the company are past my power to describe, being such as to make me feel as if I had broke into Bedlam. Their faces were all red and blotched with drink, and their heads covered with extravagant ringlets, which might never have seen a comb, while their dress was disordered to indecency, and the whole table was covered with a confusion of tankards and bottles and tobacco-pipes, not to mention playing-cards and dice. The huge man at their head bore a most terrifying aspect. He had an immense head set on a neck so short and thick that it seemed as if he must infallibly choke at every morsel he swallowed, and a belly capacious enough to have held a firkin of liquor. He had made himself easy by unbuttoning his waistcoat and the upper part of his breeches, and lolled back in his seat as if he had no mind to stir for the rest of the morning. One of his eyes was closed up, and had a French plaister across it, but the other stared and rolled enough for two.

On a bench in the window there were two other men withdrawn by themselves; but these I did not at first notice, being taken up with attending to this one-eyed ruffian.

"Who in the foul fiend's name have we here?" he called out as soon as I was come in, using many other oaths beside, which I have no need to set forth. "Is this some sprouting soul-catcher come to bestow upon us a word in season? Speak, boy, your name and business? Show your colours, d'ye hear! Or will you mount the table and pitch up a godly psalm for our sinful ears? A blister on the brat's tongue; why don't he answer?"

I stood aghast at this scurrilous address, the like of which I had never yet heard. The others followed it up with shouts of applause, and one of those at my end of the table rose and came towards me, making as if he would catch me by the shoulder to drag me forward.

But this I was not inclined to suffer.

“My name need not concern you,” I said, replying to their chairman. “As for my business here, I have come to inquire after a kinsman of mine who uses this house. Stand back, sir, I am not to be mauled by you!”

I spoke these last words sharply to the fellow who had tried to lay hold of me. Though some years my senior he was but a lean, spindle-shanked creature, whom I felt better able to give a buffet to than to take one from him.

The big man let loose a round dozen of oaths.

“Here’s a fine cockerel come into our own house of call to beard us!” he exclaimed between his profanities. “I should like to know who uses the ‘Three-decker,’ when the crew of the *Fair Maid* are here, without our licence? What is the matter with you, Trickster Tim? Are you afraid to handle the yokel?”

Thus egged on, the man, who had given way under my angry looks, made at me again. But my blood was now up, and I dealt him a blow on the jaw which sent him down fairly to the floor. He got up, spluttering blood, his clothes all smeared with the sawdust and the stains of liquor, and the whole party leaped to their feet at the same time, as if they would set upon me.

I doubt but I should have fared roughly at their hands if I had not been delivered by a most unexpected diversion.

“Stand clear, you cowards, and leave Tim Watts to fight his own corner, if he can!”

I turned round to the window at these words and beheld to my joy my cousin Rupert, who had been one of the two sitting there apart, and who had now risen, pale and very angry, with his hand on the basket of a cutlass which he wore at his belt.

Though I should have thought it kinder if he had come to my assistance earlier, instead of leaving me to show what I was made of first, I hailed his interference with much relief, and stepped quickly to his side.

But the fellows he had rebuked looked sourly in our direction and began to grumble to each other.

“No orders here!” came from one man. “No lieutenants over us ashore!” said another. “We’re all equal in the ‘Three-decker.’”

“Silence, Jim Palmer!” cried Rupert sternly. “And you too, Andrews; I thought you had more manhood in you! What reason had you for baiting this young man when he came in civilly? Do you know who he is, you fools? This is my own cousin, who has just given the slip to his sour old Puritan of a father, and come here to join our jolly fellowship!”

I felt some pricks of shame at this lewd reference to my father. But Rupert’s words completely turned the tide in my favour; and when he went on to call for the potman and order a quart of ale and a noggin of gin all round the table, I became the most popular man in the assembly for at least half an hour. My health was called for by the man in the chair who had so abused me, and who, as I now found out, was the boatswain, or foreman of the crew. They even would have Trickster Tim to apologise and shake me by the hand. He tried to go through this performance with an air of cordiality, but succeeded very ill.

After this my cousin drew me aside and presented me to his companion, whom he named to me as Mr. Sims, the captain of the *Fair Maid*. However, it did not take me long to see that though Mr. Sims commanded the vessel, by reason of his skill in navigation, yet my cousin was the real moving spirit of the entire ship’s company, and could turn the captain round his little finger, if he had a mind.

Pens and ink were then sent for, and a sheet of parchment, on which Captain Sims, who was an old hand at this work, himself drew up the articles of my apprenticeship. It was necessary that I should ship before the mast, he explained, in order to avoid provoking the jealousy of the crew; but they both promised me that I should be rated as an officer as soon as a fair excuse offered itself for my promotion. The others present were all called round to witness me sign the indenture, after

which, like a vain young fool, I must needs produce Mr. Walpole's guinea and order a fresh supply of liquor as far as it would go. This display of spirit, as they esteemed it, did my business with the crew, who having now been ashore for four weeks had spent most of their money, without in any degree lessening their thirst. But I fear good Mr. Walpole would have been but ill-satisfied if he could have known how his money was spent.

This business disposed of, Rupert thought it prudent to take me inside and have me bestowed in some safe corner of the house till the search after me should have blown over. And the first person whose help he must needs obtain in this was the tavern keeper's niece, Marian, whom I thought then, and think to this day, the most handsome creature that there was in the world, and whom I loved desperately from that hour.

## CHAPTER III

### *THE BEGINNING OF THE RIVALRY*

And now, lest it be wondered what was done by them at home in the matter of my flight, I will tell here so much as I afterwards came to know.

When the letter which I had left behind me was put into my father's hands, it appears, he read it once through, and delivered it to my mother. Next, without saying one word, he went out by himself into the stable, saddled his great horse, Gustavus, which stood seventeen hands high, presently mounted it, and rode off at a strong gallop, setting his face towards the London road.

It was not till the end of the second day that he came back, the horse covered with dirt to the shoulders. He said nothing of where he had been, but walked into the house with a stern face, and called for the family Bible, which had belonged to his grandfather in the time of the Commonwealth. This book was bound in parchment and fastened with iron clasps, and lay always on the top shelf of the old oak press, whence it had not been taken down once in a dozen years.

My mother brought it to him trembling, and when she saw him open it at the blank page within the cover, whereon were written the names of all the Fords for four generations, she fell upon her knees and implored him not to carry out what he had in his mind. But he heeded her no more than if he had been stone deaf, and taking a pen in his right hand drew it through my name and the date of my birth and baptism, making a line right across the page, which looks as if it had been drawn with a ruler to this day. Then he threw the sand upon it, and as soon as it was dry closed the book and handed it back to my mother, who was fain to restore it to its place.

All this time not a word had passed his lips. At supper my father ate but little, and drank still less. When it was time for prayers he bade my mother read the chapter instead of him, as was his wont when greatly fatigued. Whereupon that sweet saint, as I must ever have leave to call her, turned, not to the prophecy of Ezekiel, but to the gospel of Saint Luke, and read out from that chapter which contains the parable of the Prodigal Son. And when she came to the words, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" – when she had come to this place, my father, who had sat and listened hitherto, cried out in a harsh voice —

"Stop, woman!"

And he took the Bible from her and turned over the leaves till he was at the book of Ezekiel, and read the chapter in order as usual.

Nevertheless in the night my mother, who lay awake weeping, heard him give more than one sigh; and presently, while it was still dark, he rose up and went out of the room and downstairs, and stayed away above an hour; after which he came back and lay down again. And he strictly forbade her ever to utter my name in his hearing from that time.

I lay in hiding above a week before I durst venture abroad except at night. And very soothing to my spirit those night rambles were, though melancholy; for the look of all things was so changed and solemn under the black sky, or in the silent radiance of the moon, the houses were so oppressively still, and the masts of the ships so spectral upon the water, that it seemed to me by the end of those few days, that I had been exploring another world, and had got at last to be familiar with its ways.

In the daytime I was safe enough in my snug quarters in the tavern, for not a soul knew I was there save the privateer's crew. And to do those ruffians justice, though there were few other crimes they stuck at, I believe that a thousand pounds would not have tempted one of them to give me up after I had been duly embodied in their company. Indeed, I found some of them to be good fellows enough, and grew not to dislike old Muzzy, the boatswain – for so he was called, though I know not if it was his proper name or one bestowed upon him by his mates. He was, if I mistake not, a foundling. He had conceived a huge friendship for me, and would come upstairs to the garret where

I was secluded, and give me lessons in the broadsword exercise by the hour, the knowledge of which stood me in good stead in not very long.

But practise how I might, I never reached that perfection which the boatswain had attained, who was, I do think, the most complete master of his weapon then alive. I have heard, not from his mouth only, but from others of the crew, of the duel which he fought with three Frenchmen together, at a time of peace between the countries, in Civita Vecchia, and how he left them all dead upon the ground. For such were English tars in those days, a manly race of whom we have but few left now.

The rest of the crew I pass over as being of a class common enough in all our seaports. The profane language they constantly employed grew, by dint of repetition, to have no meaning in my ears, as I am sure it had none, for the most part, in theirs. The thing which I found it hardest to accustom myself to was the smoking of tobacco. Indeed, after I had lit my first pipe I fell so ill that I looked upon it as a judgment of Providence, and vowed I would never light another. But seeing all the rest at it day by day, I soon ventured again, and came at last to enjoy it no less than they did. And no doubt if there were anything mischievous in this habit when pursued in moderation, it would have been denounced by the sacred writers, who would, by means of their inspiration, have foreseen its introduction into these regions, though not then known.

But what will for ever make memorable to me the days which I spent in Yarmouth, waiting for the *Fair Maid* to be equipped for sea, was the deep joy of my first love for the woman whose lot was to be so strangely cast in with mine. I do not know whether she at first failed to perceive this passion, or whether she slighted it as the heedless fancy of a lad, for she behaved towards me as if there could be no such thoughts between us, caressing me openly before company, and thereby causing me the keenest joy and anguish at the same time.

Mistress Marian Rising, to give her her full description, was, as I have said, the niece of my host. Her own parents were settled in the East India Company's factory at Fort William, on the river Hooghley, where her father did business in drugs and was amassing, according to report, a considerable fortune. She told me that her people had refused to carry her out with them to the East, on account of the unhealthiness of that climate, but being now grown of age she was resolved to take the first occasion of going out there to join them.

She spoke much of the marvels of that great region which we now call Indostan, and of which little then was known in my part of Norfolk, describing the vast wealth and luxury of its people, the power and splendour of the nabobs and princes, and the curiosity of their buildings and manufactures. Of all these she spoke as familiarly as if she had dwelt among them, deeming, I suppose, that the connection between her and that region invested her with authority on the subject. I need scarce say that I drank in every word with greedy ears, and was become daily more inflamed with desire to voyage thither.

My cousin Rupert was frequently a third party in our conversations. He used a tone of familiarity with Marian which I was inclined to resent, though she took it in good part. But he deeply offended me one day that we were together by referring openly to what I thought my secret passion for the girl.

We had been discussing the question of how far it was safe for me to venture abroad into the streets, and he wound up by saying —

“To speak my mind plainly, Mistress Marian, I think it is high time my cousin got further out of reach of your fascination. You and he have been too much together of late; and if I mistake not Master Athelstane would not object to prolong his captivity for ever on such terms.”

“What do you mean?” I cried angrily.

But the girl only laughed.

“Be quiet, sir!” she said. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself for showing jealousy of a mere boy like this! Why, he is scarce old enough to notice whether I have brown eyes or black.”

This made me still more angry with Rupert.

“Mere boy as I am, I will thank you not to meddle between me and any lady who may choose to favour me with her goodwill!” I told him.

“I crave your pardon, my venerable cousin,” sneered Rupert. “I was not aware that matters between Mrs. Rising and you had made such progress. I would offer to go to Saint Nicholas, and bid them put up the banns next Sunday, if I were not afraid it might bring my worthy uncle over from Brandon with a whip and a dog-collar.”

I sprang to my feet as red as fire, and was as likely to have answered him with a blow as a word, if Marian had not come between us.

“Sit down, you foolish boy,” she said, giving me a look that turned my wrath into secret exultation. “As for you, Rupert Gurney, I have told you before that I will not endure your hectoring temper. If you cannot behave more civilly, there are plenty of other inns in Great Yarmouth, and you had better betake yourself to one of them.”

Rupert now saw he had gone too far, and passed off the thing as a pleasantry. After that he became as friendly to me as ever; but I could not so soon get over his ungenerous words, and I think I never felt quite the same love and admiration for him afterwards.

About this time I overheard a conversation between Mr. Sims and my cousin which I by no means liked. They were seated in the parlour of the inn by themselves, overhauling the ship’s papers, which they took out of a tin case, such as is used by mariners to guard against the chances of a wetting. I had come in to join them, for they sometimes used me as a clerk in the business of the ship, and found them too busy to heed my presence.

“I tell you, Gurney, I dislike it,” Captain Sims was saying. “Here is the date of our commission, by which, as you may see, it has run out since the conclusion of the peace. The *Fair Maid* cannot sail under that.”

Rupert cursed the commission, and cursed the date upon it, with much heartiness.

“We must sail without it, then, that’s all!” he said, as soon as he had finished cursing. “It will be all one by the time we make Gheriah. Thanks to this cursed peace we might as well whistle for another as apply to the Admiralty Commissioners.”

“Nay, not so fast!” exclaimed the other, drawing back in his chair. “That were to proclaim ourselves pirates at once.”

“Well, and pray what else have we been till now?” returned my cousin, giving him a nasty look.

Mr. Sims shook his head gravely.

“No; I have been a privateersman all my life, barring a few smuggling ventures in the late peace, but I have never put to sea without my letters of marque and reprisal, duly signed and sealed.”

Rupert curled his lip as he looked at the other.

“And what did your letters of marque say as to the Portuguese slaver we sank in the Gaboons?” he demanded scornfully. “And what of that Bristol schooner we mistook for a Frenchman off Finisterre, and had a thousand pounds of coffee out of, before we discovered the error?”

“No matter,” said Sims, setting his fist upon the table with an angry thump; “I don’t profess to be more particular than other men when I get on the high seas; but I’ve always got my letters of marque on board, and as long as I have them, d’ye see, they can’t hang me.”

Rupert seemed to be casting about for some way to satisfy his scruples. Presently he said —

“There’s no other way for it, then — we must alter the date.”

Mr. Sims gave a start, and let drop an oath.

“You’re a strange man, Gurney,” he said; “I can’t make you out this morning. You talk of forging the king’s commission as if it were no more than altering the log. Why, man, that’s a worse hanging matter than sailing with no papers at all!”

My cousin fairly lost his temper at this, and cursed the other for a thin-skinned numbskull.

“Either we sail or we don’t,” he concluded by saying, “and either we sail with a commission or without it. I am ready here to alter the date with my own hand – it is but turning a IV into a VI – to give us two years more, and you need know nothing of the matter.”

The captain came into this with surprising readiness thinking, no doubt, that he had sufficiently guarded his own neck in the business. Then for the first time they perceived me; and Sims was for making me take an oath on the gospels not to betray what I had heard. But Rupert rebuked him sharply, bidding him to know that no Ford had ever committed treachery or dishonour within the memory of man, any more, he was good enough to say, than the Gurneys themselves.

And this testimony of his so soothed me that I allowed my conscience to slumber in the matter of the forged commission. Yet it was plain enough to me by this time that my cousin was a desperate scoundrel, and that the company I had enlisted among were little better than a gang of pirates, if better they could be called.

I daresay it was not to be expected that I should associate for long with such men without falling into their ways. But what prevailed most to change me from my former character, and wrought on me for evil was, I verily believe, the frenzy of the passion which possessed me for Marian.

By this time I had gathered courage to let her know how she stood in my regard, and with the worst result for me that could have happened. For she would listen well-pleased to all the desperate love I poured into her ear, and then the next day I would find her closeted with my cousin Rupert, who was become her bold and notorious wooer, or else with one of the flash young gentlemen of the town, who frequented the tavern for no other purpose but to make love to her, and brought her presents of rings and lockets and suchlike matters, which she never scrupled to accept. And when I upbraided her for this wantonness, she gave me cruel words.

“I would have you to know that I am not your mistress, pert young sir, any more than I am your cousin’s! And I suppose I am free to do as I please, without your leave first had! If it likes me to entertain the society of other young gentlemen, be sure I shall do so; and as for the trinkets you are pleased to be jealous of, it will be time enough to cast them in my teeth when you have better to bestow on me yourself.”

With that she flung away, leaving me sore distressed and amazed. But though this speech removed somewhat of my blindness, yet the love I had for her was no whit lessened, but rather increased in vehemence. And seeing that I had but little money of my own to procure her such toys as she spoke of, I forthwith betook me to dicing and gambling, which hitherto I had refrained from, in the hopes of bettering my estate.

The luck I had in this was very various, so that at one time guineas seemed to be dropping out of my pockets, whereas at others I might ransack them through without finding so much as a silver penny. And according to the state of my fortunes, so did I prosper in Marian’s regard; and in this ill-state of my affairs I grew reckless, and drank to drive away better thoughts, and so came on rapidly to the evil hour which was to end it all.

For, as it happened, I was one night throwing the dice with my cousin Rupert, and he had won of me, and as I went on, drinking in between whiles, I lost what little coolness I had started with, and finally staked my last penny on the last throw, and lost that too. Then I flung myself back from the table with an oath.

“Fair and softly, cousin,” said Rupert, picking up the money I had thrown before him. “It does not much matter who wins, seeing that it all goes into the same pocket afterwards.”

“What do you mean?” I cried sharply. For nothing angered me more than to have him say anything which glanced at our rivalry for Marian, in which business I had too much reason to suspect he was more fortunate than myself. That very day, moreover, I had found them together, and they had looked ill-pleased at being disturbed.

“Faith, I think you must know my meaning well enough by this time,” answered Rupert, with an insulting smile. “Before you try to play the gallant you must line your pocket better.”

“Hold your tongue!” I said fiercely. “I am not used to buy favours, like some who have nothing but their purse to commend them.”

“Then you should go where favours are not sold,” he sneered, with an evil smile.

“Those words in your teeth!” I shouted, starting up and clapping my hand on my sword, which I had bought two days before of a Jew.

By this time the noise of our quarrel had aroused the whole room, and the company were crowding round us, the men of the *Fair Maid* in the front. Rupert bit his lip as he saw where he stood.

“Peace, youngster,” he said, with a threatening look which belied his words. “I will not be forced into a quarrel here.”

“Here or outside, I care not,” says I, “but I swear you shall take back the slander you have cast upon a woman you are not fit to speak with!”

“D – n you!” says Rupert, “do you want me to fight for a – ”

He got no farther, for with that I caught up the dice-box and dashed it between his eyes, so that he fairly staggered back, and the blood started from his nostrils. And then, almost before I knew what was happening, his sword was out, and mine was clashing against it, and the table was overturned on the floor, and then there was a rush and a shout, and some one was holding me back from behind, while Mr. Sims and the boatswain stood between us, and Rupert, with a look on his face which I had never seen there before, was saying in a very steady voice —

“Gentlemen, you may arrange it as you please, but take notice that it must be *à la mort*.”

## CHAPTER IV

### “À LA MORT”

So it had come to this, that before the dust of my father's fields was well off my shoes I was committed to a duel to the death with a desperate, vindictive man, who had been steeped in bloodshed before I had ever handled a sword, and that man my own near kinsman.

At the time I was less frightened than I have often been since in thinking over it. The others were more alarmed for me than I was for myself, and I heard Mr. Sims and old Muzzy urging upon Rupert to let the matter go no further. But this he would not now hear of, and in the state of mind I was then in I should have been little better satisfied than he to have had the affair patched up.

At last they saw it was of no use to seek an accommodation between us, and they withdrew together to settle how we were to fight, Captain Sims, as I understood, acting in my cousin's interest, while the boatswain did the same office for me.

While they were discussing it, which it took them some time to do, Rupert and I sat on opposite sides of the room. He put on a great air of indifference, talking familiarly with those of his friends who stood about him, while I could do nothing but stare across at him with a horrible fascination, as the man by whose hand, in all likelihood, I was to die within the next half-hour. I remember noting for the first time what a finely formed person he had, tall and supple as a lath of steel. As far as that went I was no weakling, and I have been told that at that time we greatly resembled each other, though I do not think I can ever have shared my cousin's good looks.

I was becoming feverish over the delay of our seconds, if such they can be called, when they rose from their corner, and the boatswain came across to me with a very grave air, Mr. Sims at the same time going over to Rupert.

“We have arranged,” the boatswain said to me, in a serious voice, “that you are to fight out at sea. A boat is to be moored to the buoy off the mouth of the river, and you will be rowed out and put into it together, one at each end. You are to be armed with cutlasses and left there together. There will be a pair of sculls on board, and the one who kills the other will throw his body overboard, so as to leave no trace, and then row ashore. If the boat does not return at the end of an hour, we shall come out to her to see what has happened. Do you agree to this?”

He spoke these words in a distinct, loud voice, so as to be overheard by those who stood next. Then, before I could answer, he bent over quickly and laid his lips to my ear, whispering —

“Refuse it, boy, refuse it! It will be a narrow match enough between you with the cutlass, which was the weapon I stuck out for for your sake. But out in a trumpery rocking boat, with you a landlubber against a man that has been at sea these ten years, I would not give a farden for your life.”

He said this with many strong oaths, for I honestly believe the old pirate had got an affection for me. But he wasted his breath as far as I was concerned, my pride being then too fierce to admit of my shrinking from any terms that might be offered by the other side.

“Tell them I accept,” I said sullenly, “and make no more ado about it. How soon can we reach this place?”

The old fellow cursed me roundly for an obstinate, bloody-minded young fool.

“Give me a hug,” he wound up by saying, “for blast me if you ain't a youngster after my own heart!” And he fell to and embraced me heartily, kissing me on both cheeks, and shedding tears plentifully; for he was three-parts drunk, and clearly looked upon me as a dead man.

And in that light I saw that the company present regarded me, my cousin's prowess being well known by many duels which he had fought in the past; and though I had pretty well made up my mind that I was to die, I suffered no small discouragement and chagrin from the compassionate looks which were cast upon me. My old enemy, Trickster Tim, also thought this a safe occasion to insult

me, coming up close before me and peering into my face, as if I were already so much carrion. Nor had I the spirit to resent his insolence.

Captain Sims now led the way out of the house, holding Rupert by the arm, while I followed with my friend. The rest of the crew swarmed out after us, but old Muzzy sharply ordered them back, taking only two men to pull the oars, for we had a long way to row before the buoy could be reached.

It was a miserable voyage for me, sitting there in the stern, not three paces from Rupert, shivering in the cold night air, and perhaps from fear as well, as we dropped slowly down the river, past the black piles of the landing jetties and the sleeping ships. Our course was lit only by the stars, save where a ship's light cast a sickly gleam upon the water as we approached it, and faded away as we rowed on. The whole way I never once opened my lips, but the others talked together in low voices, turning themselves away from me in the same manner as if I were a convict being led to execution. And as for my own thoughts, they were distracted enough, especially when I called to mind my dear mother and my good and upright father, and how little they imagined the business in which I was now engaged. These reflections so softened me that I believe if my cousin had made the least move towards a reconciliation my whole wrath would have melted away. But no doubt he had made up his mind that only my death could restore his authority amongst the ruffians whom he led.

At last our dreary passage was ended, and we were arrived at the place agreed on for the encounter. We had towed down a smaller boat in our wake, and this they now fastened to the buoy, and we stepped into it, Rupert at the bows and I at the stern. Then the boatswain gripped my hand for the last time, whispering to me to beware of Gurney's upper-cut, and so they bade us farewell and rowed off quickly in the darkness, like men who would avoid the sight of a murder.

So there were we, left alone in that frail compartment, out there upon the heaving water, with nothing but death in our hearts. I had but time to breathe a prayer, which I did with some misgiving as to how it would be received, when my cousin drew his cutlass and stepped into the centre of the boat. I rose to meet him with my weapon in my hand, and we stood there facing one another, with only the width of the seat between us.

"Are you ready?" says Rupert quickly. And before I had time to answer he brought down his cutlass with such force that unless I had guarded it the blade would have split open my head.

It was now that I had reason to be thankful for the lessons I had received at the hands of the boatswain, for Rupert's blows came so thick and fast that I had all I could do to parry them. I bore his last caution to me in mind, and soon found the importance of it, for though my cousin made many feints at my shoulder and other parts of my body, yet the only blow into which he put his real force was the upper-cut at my head.

I kept my eyes fixed upon his, as I had been taught, and soon saw a savage light arising therein when he found he made so little impression on me. Indeed, if we had fought on firm ground I believe that, as the boatswain said, I should have been his match, but the rocking of the boat gave him an advantage, and presently he pursued a feint further than I expected, and gave me a gash of about three inches long in my left thigh.

The first smart of the wound made me gasp for breath, but the next moment it had so raised my fury that I left off the defensive and fell upon my enemy with all my might, hitting and slashing so desperately that, do what he would, I broke down his guard and laid open his forehead over his right eye, and the blood began to trickle down his face.

This transformed his own anger into a tempest, and now, indeed, we went at it more like two savages than Christian men. For the cutlass, by the very reason that it is not so deadly an instrument as the small-sword, is capable of inflicting a very great many wounds before any fatal effect takes place. And so, becoming less heedful of our guard as we warmed to it, we wounded each other all over the body in a most desperate manner, till my cousin seemed to me to be covered with blood from head to foot, and I can have been little better, for I felt the blood running from me at above a dozen places.

My enemy was the first to see the folly of this, for he began to change his tactics, drawing back from my assault and keeping on the defensive till he should lure me on to give him an advantage. And in this at length he had nearly succeeded, but happening to forget the seat which lay behind him in the bows of the boat, he overbalanced himself against it and fell backwards, still gripping his weapon in his hand.

I scorned to take advantage of this accident, but stayed where I was to give him time to get up. He lay upon his back for a minute, glaring sullenly at me to see if I would kill him. But finding that I had no such mind he recovered himself nimbly enough. And being, no doubt, still further enraged at this accident having put him, as it were, into my power, he now made at me with the most terrible vehemence, raining down blows upon me sufficient to have felled an ox. And then in the midst of it all, while I was warding off his fury, and the sparks flew from our weapons every instant, I suddenly felt my hand jarred as though I had touched a conger, and the blade of my cutlass snapped off at the hilt with a crash, and I stood there at his mercy.

He stopped short, as much astonished as I was, while I sank down on the seat next the stern, ready to sob, and put up my hands before my face.

“That cursed Jew has cheated me of my life!” I groaned between my set teeth.

Rupert rested the point of his cutlass upon the seat in front of him and looked over at me curiously.

“Young man,” he said, “your life is forfeit to me, and it hath never been said that Rupert Gurney spared an enemy. Yet, inasmuch as you are of my blood and but raw in the world, I have half a mind to make terms with you. Will you make your apology for the violence you put upon me in the tavern, and swear to repeat its terms before all those who were witnesses of our dispute?”

I looked up at him and smiled bitterly in his face.

“Do you understand me so little, and you a Ford by the mother’s side?” I answered him. “Now that I have no weapon you may murder me if you will, but apology you shall have none from me – unless,” I added, “you take back your insult to the woman I love.”

“You young fool!” he ground out savagely. “That drab you make such a to-do about has been mine this two months past.”

I leave it unsaid how these words affected me, both then and for long afterwards. For up to that moment I had looked upon the girl with as pure a reverence as any boy ever cherished for a maid, and my cousin’s vile boast, cast it back to him as I might, sank into my mind and worked there like a poison.

“I believe you lie,” I said to him with marvellous coldness. For what with the loss of blood, and the despair which had seized upon me at the breaking of my weapon, and the news I had just received, I was become quite dispirited, and was indifferent to what he might do with me.

“Die, then, since you will have me kill you!” he exclaimed, and began advancing down the boat towards me.

But as he stepped over the middle seat it chanced that he struck his foot against one of the oars which lay along the boat’s bottom; and the rattling of this oar put a new thought into my mind.

It so happened that I had been used to play with the quarterstaff at home, and old Sugden, the rat-catcher, who was esteemed the greatest proficient in this sort of exercise in our part of the country, had had many a bout with me, in which, before I ran away, he had been forced to confess that I was very well able to cope with him. Now, therefore, in my extremity, seeing death so near at hand – for up to this moment I had hardly believed that my cousin would kill me – I made shift to snatch at an oar, and drawing it to me just in time put myself in a posture of defence before he could strike me.

He drew back, greatly astounded, and swore beneath his breath.

“What fool’s game is this, boy? Would you break honour with me? We were agreed to fight with cutlasses.”

“And now that my cutlass is broke foully you would take and murder me!” I retorted, and being now incensed at his bloodthirstiness, after I had once spared his life, I cursed him in the face for a coward.

This was more than he could bear. He leaped across the seat, with his head stooped, to come inside the sweep of my weapon, but this was a trick I had had experience of, and though I found my oar very heavy and cumbrous I yet managed to repulse him with a crack on the head. And immediately he raised his cutlass to strike back I caught him a very smart blow on the knuckles, and sent his weapon flying over the side of the boat into the water, where it instantly sank.

By this time I think we were both too furious to be willing to end the combat without one or the other’s death. Rupert, as soon as he knew what had happened, fairly sprang upon me, and clutched my throat, bearing me down with him into the boat. Here he knelt above me, squeezing my windpipe, and emitting horrid snarls like a wild beast. My senses began to forsake me, and I was as good as lost, when, by the direct mercy of Providence, my right hand encountered the blade of my own cutlass, lying close beside us, which I instantly snatched at, and plunged as hard as I could thrust into Rupert’s side. And with that, feeling his fingers relax themselves as he tottered sideways from off me, I raised myself half up, lifted him by the thighs, and cast him clean over the side of the boat into the sea. And that done I sank down again in a bloody swoon, and perceived nothing more.

It was, as I learned, above a week afterwards when I fully came to myself, and discovered that I was lying in my former garret at the “Three-decker.” There was an old woman coming into the room to wait upon me, who told me that I had been brought ashore on the night of the duel by men wearing masks; and one of them, whom she knew by his voice and carriage to be the boatswain of the *Fair Maid*, had given money out of his pocket for me to be taken care of till such time as I should recover.

In the state of weakness to which I was reduced I shed tears at hearing of this kindness on the part of that rough man, who was, I sadly feared, a great scoundrel, of most villainous evil life. My next business was to ask what had become of him and the rest of the *Fair Maid’s* crew.

“The *Fair Maid* sailed yesterday,” the crone answered. “They warped her out on the afternoon ebb. ’Tis said she sails under a privateer’s commission against the French.”

I scarce knew whether to be glad of this news, or sorry. I told myself that I could hardly have looked for a welcome among those men after being the means of their lieutenant’s death; and, moreover, I had learnt enough of their character to feel strongly averse to a cruise in such company. Yet they were the only friends I had, and I was grown used to them; and the thought that I was left there, as it were, alone, with nothing to turn to, made me very dismal after all.

It seemed somewhat strange to me, during the rest of that day, that Marian had never once come to inquire for me; but I put off speaking about it to the morrow. In the morning I awoke greatly refreshed, and feeling well enough to leave my bed, which I did, and came down into the bar of the house to look for her.

I found only her uncle, a weazened, peevish man, who had showed himself very little while the privateersmen were about his house. I bade him a courteous good morrow.

“Good morrow t’ye,” he snapped out churlishly. “I’m glad to see you’re about again, as I daresay you know your reckoning has run out.”

This I did not believe, but thought it beneath me to pick a quarrel with such a man. Besides, he was Marian’s uncle.

“Any charges you may have against me shall be fairly met,” I answered proudly. “But where is Mistress Marian? I have not seen her these two days.”

“And you’re not like to see her again, I take it,” he returned disagreeably. “At least, not in my house; I’ve had enough of the impudent baggage.”

“What are you saying, man?” I demanded, much dismayed. “You need not miscall your own niece, I should think. But what of her? Do you mean she has left you?”

“Aye, what else should I mean? And right glad I am to be rid of such a trollop, drawing all the rapsallions of the port in here, and bringing my tavern into disrepute.”

He spoke so bitterly that I believe he was trying to talk himself into thinking he had profited by her departure. For in reality she had brought him the chief part of his custom, and there was at that moment, as I could perceive, not a soul in the tavern beside ourselves. But I did not stop to reflect on this.

“Where has she gone? What has happened?” I questioned breathlessly, with a terrible fear in my heart.

“Nay, whither she has gone is more than I can tell you, for as likely as not the jade has lied to me. But she left this place two days ago, in the afternoon, and all the account she gave me was that she had taken her passage in the *Fair Maid* for her father’s house in Calcutta.”

I fell down on a bench, like a man stunned, and groaned aloud. Then I sprang to my feet again and made for the door.

“I will follow her!” I cried out madly. “If she has gone to the end of the world I will go after her, and all the devils in hell shall not hold me back!”

And leaving the man there, staring at me as if he thought I was crazed, I ran out of the house, and so stumbled right into the arms of a pressgang come ashore off a king’s ship which had that morning dropped anchor in Yarmouth Roads.

## CHAPTER V

### *ON BOARD THE KING'S SHIP*

The license of these pressgangs was so well known, and had been made familiar to me by so many tales, that I had little hope from the first of escaping their clutches. It is true they were only authorised to impress seamen and fishermen, and that after proving their commission before justices of the peace. But if report did not belie them, they looked not too closely into a man's seamanship; but, if they found a likely fellow, regarded all as fish which came into their net.

There was a lieutenant set above the fellows into whose hands I had fallen, a tall, lantern-jawed, middle-aged man, with a most abominable squint, and to him I addressed myself:

"Sir, I am not in a condition to be pressed by you, I am not a mariner by calling; and, moreover, I am but just risen from a bed of sickness."

He glanced over my dress before he answered, with something of a smile. And, indeed, for a landsman, my costume was something out of the way, for during the time since I had signed articles to Captain Sims I had done my best to equip myself in true sea-dog fashion.

"You surprise me, young sir," the lieutenant said presently, when he had surveyed me. "Your dress tallies but ill with your professions. If you wore but a cutlass, and had a pistol to your belt, I could have sworn you to be a smuggler at the least."

I hung my head at this, for it was my own vanity that had led me into the mess. I could only fall back on my second excuse.

"Nevertheless, you are mistaken, sir," I said. "But however that may be, be pleased to believe me when I tell you that I am scarce yet recovered from several severe wounds."

"Indeed! I thought I had seen you coming out of yonder tavern at a marvellous nimble gait. But my eyes are indifferent bad. Here, Master Veale, what say you, does this young man look too sick for our purpose? He says he is not recovered of his wounds."

The man he applied to, who was master of the ship's cutter, answered him in the same jesting manner.

"I see nothing the matter with un, your honour. But perhaps we had best carry un aboard and let the ship's doctor feel his pulse."

"I protest against this treatment," I said angrily. "In the name of his Majesty, I say, unhandle me."

"Nay," quoth the lieutenant, "my hearing is as indifferent as my eyesight, and I follow you not. Master Veale, if this youngster uses any blasphemy or indecency let him be gagged till we come aboard again."

This threat was enough to silence me, if I had not been otherwise afraid to make a stir. For though I might have got some of the passers-by to succour me, it being broad daylight, and these impressments most unpopular among seafaring men, yet I foresaw that it would quickly come to a question of who I was, and if my name once became bruited abroad there were friends of my father's in the town who would have made short work of sending me back to him. And sooner than face the disgrace of this, as I considered it, I was willing to try my luck with King George.

I therefore walked along with the pressgang, by the side of Master Veale, who used me civilly enough when he found I had given up the thoughts of resisting.

I was not a little amazed and delighted when we came out upon the shore, and I caught sight of the *Talisman*, as she was called, riding at her anchor. For she was a great line-of-battle ship, such as I had never yet seen, carrying seventy-four guns upon her three decks, which rose above the water like a huge wall, with the muzzles of the cannon plainly visible through the opening of her portholes. This majestic mass lay like a floating fortress upon the waves, and overhead her three masts towered

up into the very clouds, with their yards set in order, and the ropes crossing from one to the other as intricate as a spider's web. Last of all, from a flagstaff on the stern, brandished the ensign of Great Britain, in defiance of her enemies. And my heart swelled as I gazed upon it, and remembered how that banner had struck terror into the Frenchmen, and Dutch, and Spaniards, in so many great and memorable fights. Perhaps in that moment I had a foretaste of those glorious triumphs of the British arms in which I was hereafter to take a part.

As soon as we were brought on board this fine vessel – and by this time we had pressed two or three others of the Yarmouth men – we were presented to the captain for his inspection.

The captain, it was easy to perceive, was a man of great quality, being, as I learned before long, a nephew of Lord Saxmundham, in Suffolk, who at that time sat upon the Board of Admiralty. He had the most elegant hands and feet of any man I ever saw, and was dressed with great care, having long ruffles of the finest lace to his neck and wrists, and a gold-hilted small-sword by his side. Even my cousin Rupert beside him would have looked but a country boor.

He spoke to the lieutenant who had headed our party, drawling out his words in a fashion absurd in a London fop, but disgusting in the commander of a man-o'-war.

“Well, Mr. Griffiths, what sort of scum have you got hold of this time? Faugh!” he continued, taking out a pocket napkin to wipe his nose, “I declare the fellows all stink of herrings!”

This last was a downright lie, for I had never so much as stepped into a fishing smack. And besides, the herring fishery was not yet begun.

“Sir, that is a fault which can soon be amended,” returned the lieutenant, biting his lip at the other's insolence. “For the rest, they looked to me to be sturdy rascals enough, and, I doubt, will make good seamen.”

“Yes, looked to you, my good sir; but then, you know, your sight is none of the best,” sneered the captain, between whom and his officer there appeared to be some jealousy.

Mr. Griffiths, though he had jested at his infirmity in speaking to me, writhed under this allusion to it from another. He gave his answer with spirit.

“Captain Wilding, I have done what you ordered me in impressing these men. If you don't think them serviceable I shall be happy to set them ashore again.”

The other waved his napkin between them as if he would have brushed away a fly.

“There, there, my worthy man, that is quite enough! I have seen the tarry scoundrels, and as long as they have not the smallpox, I am content. Bestow them as you please.”

Thereupon we were led into the fore part of the ship, to be rated according to our several abilities. And it fell out luckily for me, for the lieutenant, when he discovered that I had had some education, and could cast accounts – a business of which he plainly knew nothing – informed me that he believed the purser stood in need of an assistant, and offered to recommend me to him. This kindness on his part I gladly closed with, not that I liked the duty better than the common service of a ship, but because I guessed that I should thereby be delivered from the molestations of the crew, there being no greater pleasure to the vulgar of every profession than to rough-handle and abuse those who come newly amongst them. And herein, as it turned out, I had judged rightly, and for so long as I remained upon that ship I suffered no ill-usage, except at the hands of my superiors.

But before this was settled I had a favour to ask of the worthy lieutenant.

“One thing I must bargain for, with your leave, Lieutenant Griffiths,” I said to him, speaking boldly, as I discerned him to be favourable to me, “and that is, that if we should come to fighting with the enemy I am to take part with the rest.”

Mr. Griffiths laughed when he heard this demand.

“Why, there now,” he cried, slapping his thigh, “if I couldn't have sworn that you were one of the sort we wanted directly I clapped eyes on you! Never fear, lad, you shall have your fill of fighting before we go into dock again; for – I will tell you so much – we are under orders to join Admiral

Watson's fleet at the Nore, and a man with a healthier stomach for such work never hoisted pennant on a three-decker."

"I am glad, at all events, that we shall sail under a fighting admiral," I responded saucily, "for, as for our captain –"

He stopped me at this point in a manner which terrified me, hurling a string of curses at my head sufficient to have sunk me through the deck.

"Hold your impertinent tongue!" he said in conclusion. "I would have you know better than to pass remarks on your officers in my hearing. I have had men put in irons for less. Follow me this minute to the purser, and remember you are on board of one of his Majesty's ships, and not a dirty herring smack."

By which I saw that, however this gentleman secretly despised his commanding officer, he was too honourable to encourage the tattle of his inferiors. In this no doubt he showed his breeding; for it was his boast that he was sprung from one of the most ancient families in Wales, where the gentry, he was wont to say, are of older lineage than those of any other country in the world.

The purser proved to be a Scotchman, against which nation I had taken a strong prejudice, on account of the wicked and unnatural support given by them to the Chevalier in his bloody invasion of this kingdom, and which prejudice has since been further confirmed in me by the late mean and notorious conduct of Lord Bute. However, I found Mr. Sanders, the purser, to be a respectable, religious man, having as little love for Papists and Jacobites as I had myself. He received me without much civility, but if he showed me no great favour neither did he do me any injury, and in his accounts he cheated the crew as little as any purser I ever heard of.

But not to linger over these matters, the only thing that befell me during our voyage to the Nore was an extraordinary painful sickness and retching, the anguish of which I could not have believed possible to be borne, and which many times made me wish I had never quitted my father's house. During the continuance of this malady I was rendered quite unable to do my duty, to Mr. Sanders's no small discontent, and was left to the sole companionship of an Irishman, one Michael Sullivan, who became much attached to me, and soothed my sufferings by every means in his power. He was a corporal of the Marines, and had been three times promoted to be sergeant for his bravery in action, and three times degraded again for drunkenness. Among his comrades he was known as Irish Mick: and here I observed a peculiarity which I have found amongst others of that nation; for though he would continually be boasting of his country, and exalting the Irish race above every other on the face of the earth, yet no sooner did any of us remark on it to him that he was an Irishman than he straightway fell into a violent passion, as if we had laid some insult upon him.

While I lay thus ill, as I have said, I lost all thoughts of the quest I had meant to undertake for Marian, and would not have cared if the ship had been bound for the infernal regions. But as soon as I was recovered sufficiently to come on deck, whither I was very kindly assisted by the Irishman, I grew exceedingly curious as to our destination.

"Does any one know whither we are bound when we have joined the Admiral's fleet?" I asked of Sullivan.

"Faith, and it's that same question I'm just after putting to the boatswain's mate," he answered, "and the sorrow a soul on board that knows any better than myself and yourself."

He pronounced his speech with a very rich brogue, which I shall no more attempt to imitate than Captain Wilding's affectation. For indeed there seem to be as many ways of pronouncing English as there are people that speak it, and even in Norfolk itself I have met with people who were not free from something like the Suffolk twang. Seeing, I suppose, that I was disappointed by this answer, he leant over and whispered in my ear —

"But it's my belief that King George is tired of the peace with the French, and that he's sending us out to sink a few of their ships and maybe bombard a town or two, just by way of letting them know that we're ready to begin again."

I answered him impatiently, for my sickness had made me fretful.

“I believe you are a fool, Mick! It is well known that we never go to war with the French unless they have first provoked us.”

“Well, and sure haven’t they provoked us enough by all their doings in America and the Indies, not to mention the battle of Fontenoy, which my own cousin Dennis helped them to win, more by token; though he got a bullet in his left arm before the fighting begun, and had to content himself with cheering while the others were at it.”

“That will do,” I said crossly, for I had heard of the battle of Fontenoy and his cousin Dennis before, and it was a sore point between us. Nor could I understand how a man who had the privilege of being born a British subject, though liable to the proper severities of the penal code against Papists, could traitorously desert his allegiance and take service with our natural enemies.

However, I learned nothing further of our destination till we reached the Nore, which we did about the end of the third day. Here we found the rest of the squadron awaiting us, and, the *Talisman* being the biggest ship in company, Admiral Watson immediately hauled down his pennant off the *Victory*, of fifty guns, and came aboard of us.

I was leaning over the chains with Sullivan when the barge came alongside, and could see a gentleman in the stern, sitting beside the Admiral, in a military uniform, and having a very resolute and commanding countenance.

“Who is that?” I asked.

“That? Why that’s Charlie Watson,” he replied, mistaking my meaning. “It’s myself that ought to know, for I sailed under him against the Spaniards in ’44, and a devil of a beating we gave them. Hooray!”

The cheer was taken up by the rest of the crew as they caught sight of this gallant seaman, who had been made Rear-Admiral of the Blue in his thirty-fifth year, and that without any influence at his back, but solely on account of his splendid services in the Spanish wars. Mr. Wilding, who had come up on deck to receive the Admiral, looked round very sourly when he heard the cheer, but was ashamed to openly rebuke us.

“Nay, but who is the other beside him,” I went on to ask, being strongly moved to interest by the sight of this gentleman. He appeared to be by some years junior to Mr. Watson, who was now somewhat over forty, but in spite of that, and of his treating the Admiral with much ceremony, there was that in the air of this officer which made an impression of authority, and which drew all eyes towards him as soon as they were arrived upon the quarterdeck.

Sullivan professed himself as ignorant as to the stranger’s identity as I was myself, nor was I near enough to hear what passed when Admiral Watson presented him to Mr. Wilding and the other officers. Nevertheless, I could see that they received him with extraordinary respect, even the captain seeming to brisk up and to put on a more manly carriage under this gentleman’s eye.

After giving one or two keen glances round the deck, which set us all on the alert, the officer walked quickly forward, and the whole party following him, they went below, immediately after which the signal for weighing anchor was made to the squadron, and the crew was set to work putting on all sail. In the midst of which business the report ran round the ship, and reached me I know not from what lips, that the passenger we had received on board was no other than the famous Mr. Robert Clive, who had just been created a lieutenant-colonel by the king, and whom we were carrying out to India to take up his government of Fort St. David in the Carnatic.

At this time, though Mr. Clive had not yet reached to that height of eminence which he afterwards attained, he was already known as one of the bravest Englishmen of his time, and I had heard from many quarters of his glorious exploits in the Indies. Although a civilian by profession, when the settlements of the East India Company in Madras were threatened with destruction by the French, he had exchanged his pen for a sword, and, with a mere handful of English and Sepoys, had captured and maintained the town of Arcot against a great army of the French and their allies, after

which he had beaten them in many engagements, and in the end wrested the entire province of the Carnatic from their hands. Since then he had been in England, where he had stood for the Parliament, and, as it was thought, had given up all intentions of returning to Indostan. Now the news that we had him on board with us, and that he was on his way out, no doubt to drive the last remains of the French power from that quarter of the world, came on my ears like the summons of a trumpet, and went far to make me content with the accident that had thrown me in the way of the pressgang.

Mr. Griffiths, the lieutenant, who had continued to take some notice of me, for which I was not ungrateful, chanced to come by while I was full of these thoughts, and after confirming the news which I had heard, fell to talking with me about our cruise.

“You see I did you a good turn by bringing you off from that muddy fishing-hole,” he was pleased to observe presently. “Now you are likely to see some service, and, if luck serves, to bring home a good share of prize-money.”

By this time I had called to mind the sailing of the *Fair Maid*, and the destination of that passenger of hers, to see whom once more I would have given all the prize-money in the world.

“Are we like to make the Hooghley river, do you think, sir, when we get out to the Indies?” I ventured to ask.

“That’s as it may be,” he answered, friendly enough. “All I can tell you – for I believe this to be no secret – is that our first port in those seas is Bombay. And further, since we cannot attack the French till war breaks out, I may give you to know that our first business is to root out certain pirates that infest that coast, and who have their headquarters at the citadel of Gheriah, in the Morattoes’ country.”

I turned silent at this, remembering how I had heard the name of Gheriah pronounced between my cousin and Mr. Sims in the parlour of the “Three-decker”, and feeling a dreadful apprehension that I was to meet with the privateers (as they called themselves) in circumstances which I had little desired.

Eleven months later – for we were beset by contrary winds all round the continent of Africa, and put in at divers places on the way – we came to an anchor in the harbour of Bombay. And there, riding at a mooring under the very walls of the fort, the first vessel that I saw was the *Fair Maid* herself, looking as peaceful as if she had never fired a gun.

## CHAPTER VI

### *IN THE POWER OF THE ENEMY*

On our voyage outward one thing had occurred to me which, as it turned out afterwards, was to prove of very great consequence; this was my learning of the native Indian language.

Colonel Clive, who had never been at the pains to acquire it himself, had brought out in his train as secretary a Mr. Scrafton, who was well versed in the Indostanee, and who was obliging enough to offer to impart it to me, I having rendered him some services in the transcribing of his papers and accounts. Having much time on my hands on so long a voyage, I very thankfully accepted his proposal, though little then foreseeing the benefit I was to derive from it.

This connection between us brought me a good deal under the notice of Mr. Clive, who was several times pleased to address his conversation to me, and to inquire my name and what had brought me into that service.

When I told him I had run away from home he seemed not a little amused, though he affected to rebuke me.

“I perceive you are a young man of a reckless spirit,” he observed, but whether in irony or not I could not tell. “And pray what do you intend to do when we get to the Indies?”

“Why, sir,” I answered hardily, “as soon as war breaks out I mean to run away from the ship and enlist under your honour.”

“The devil you do!” he cried, a smile showing itself on his stern face. “Mr. Scrafton, do you hear my little purser here? I have a mind to report your speech to Mr. Sanders.”

But though he said this, I could see that he was not ill-pleased. And whether from that occasion or another, by the time our voyage was ended I was known all over the ship as Colonel Clive’s purser. And how proud the title made me I forbear to say, but I know that if Mr. Clive had ordered me to march into Delhi, and pluck the Great Mogul by the beard, I should have thought it a little thing to do.

The first thing I did after we had dropped our anchor was to beg for leave to go ashore, which Mr. Sanders granted with some difficulty. Mr. Griffiths was good enough to give me a place in the cutter, and as soon as we were landed I separated myself from the rest, and without staying to examine the curiosities of Bombay, which is a fine great city, built on an island, I procured a boatman to take me off privately to the *Fair Maid*.

The boatman I applied to was an Indian. He used me with wondrous civility, calling me Sahib, which is an oriental term of respect, and bowing before me to the very ground. When we were got into the boat, however, he proved but a poor oarsman, and indeed all the natives of that country seem but a feeble race, owing, no doubt, to their idolatrous religion, which forbids them to eat flesh.

We arrived at the stern of the *Fair Maid* without accident, but to my surprise I could see nobody on the deck. Bidding the Indian wait for me I scrambled on board without hailing, and proceeded to examine the cabin. I found this likewise to be deserted, and was beginning to think the vessel was empty when, on turning to come out, I found myself face to face with a dark man in a turban, bearing a naked scymetar in his hand, who had crept in behind me.

“Who are you?” I demanded, addressing him in Indostanee.

But he shook his head, for, as I was to find out, the Morattoes, to which nation he belonged, speak a different dialect of their own.

While I was considering what to do with him, since his behaviour was very threatening, I was greatly relieved by seeing an Englishman come in after him, who proved, indeed, to be no other than my old acquaintance, Trickster Tim.

The sight of me gave him a great shock, and at first I believe he mistook me for a spirit from the other world, which perhaps was not strange, considering that he had last seen me on the other side of the globe, and lying very near to death's door.

I spoke him friendly, nothing doubting that he would be pleased to welcome a fellow-countryman.

“Well, Tim, how d'ye do, and how are all aboard the *Fair Maid*?”

As soon as he had heard my voice his apprehensions vanished. He gazed at me for a minute, as if undecided what to do, and then, putting on a smile, stepped forward and shook me by the hand.

“And how did you get here?” he asked. “We thought we had left you in Yarmouth.”

Not thinking any concealment needful, I told him my story, which he listened to very attentively. At the end he spoke some words to the Morattoe, who went out of the cabin.

“Sit down and make yourself comfortable,” he said to me. “Our men are all gone ashore, but the captain will come off presently and be right glad to see you safe again.”

“I can't stay long,” I told him, “because I have only got leave for a couple of hours.”

At this he smiled a little queerly, but pulled out a bottle of rum and some glasses, and prevailed on me to take a drink with him. We sat thus for some time, talking, and he told me that the ship had been out there for more than a month, having escaped some of the headwinds we had had to contend with.

“And what of Mrs. Rising?” I said at last, for I had been shy of putting this question to such a man. “I understand she took passage with you.”

He grinned at this, rather maliciously.

“I thought you'd come to that,” he said. “I didn't suppose it was for love of your comrades that you had come on board so quickly. As for Mistress Marian, she's ashore, and for her address I may refer you to the captain when he finds you here.”

“The captain is rather slow in coming,” I observed, getting on to my feet. “I think I must be going ashore.”

With that I walked out of the cabin, Trickster Tim following at my heels. When I got on to the deck, I stared about me in dismay. Not a sign could I see of my boatman.

“What's become of that fellow who brought me out?” I cried, turning to my companion.

The scoundrel laughed in my face.

“I sent word to him not to wait for you,” he coolly replied, “as I thought maybe you'd rather stay with us.”

“Rascal!” I shouted, taking him roughly by the arm. “What is the meaning of this villainy?”

“There's the captain; you'd better ask him,” he answered.

And turning round as the sound of oars smote on my ears, I perceived a boat coming alongside, and seated upright in the stern the very man of all others whom I had never thought or wished to see again. It was my cousin Rupert.

He caught sight of me at the same moment, and a fierce scowl passed across his brow.

“Whom have you got there, Tim?” he called out, standing up in the boat to get a view of me.

“Mr. Ford, sir, purser's assistant of his Majesty's ship *Talisman*.”

At that moment the boat came alongside and my cousin leaped on to the deck, followed by four or five of the crew. He surveyed me with a glance of bitter hatred, mingled with triumph.

“So, cousin, I did not kill you after all! Never mind, I am glad you have remembered your old articles and are come to join us once more. We have lacked a cabin-boy since your desertion, and if his Majesty can spare you, we shall be glad of your services.”

I was too confounded to reply, or to take much heed of this mocking harangue. I had as firmly believed Rupert to be dead as, it seems, he had believed me. The truth, as I gathered it by degrees afterwards, seemed to be this: At the moment of my casting him out of the boat in which we had fought, the other boat was returning to find out what had been the result of the battle. They had

first picked up Rupert out of the water, when he was on the point of death, and had then found me senseless, and to all appearance mortally wounded, where I had fallen. They carried us both back with them, and finding Rupert revived, had concealed him on the *Fair Maid* till she should sail. The boatswain, out of a kindness for me, and knowing the other's vindictive nature, had persuaded him that it was impossible for me to recover, and so they had left me.

As soon as I was able to collect myself I demanded to have speech with Mr. Sims, the captain.

"You will meet with Mr. Sims where you are going," retorted Rupert. "In the meantime any business you have with the captain of this vessel may be transacted with me."

"Then I insist that you put me ashore instantly," I said, with resolution. "Would you kidnap me under the very guns of his Majesty's fleet?"

"Not so fast," returned Rupert, keeping his temper, as he could afford to do, having the upper hand. "You have forgot your indentures, by which you are bound apprentice to the good ship *Fair Maid*, sailing under his Majesty's letters of marque and commission."

"Under a forged commission," I retorted hotly. "I refuse to be bound by indentures to a pirate!"

This outburst was, no doubt, what my cousin had been waiting for, to set the opinion of the crew against me. He now turned to his followers, very stern.

"Take this youth down to the forecabin and put him in irons. If he repeats his scandalous aspersions, I will bring him to trial as a deserter and mutineer."

I had no means of resistance, and his orders were carried out, the scoundrel who had tricked me into waiting for Rupert's return, taking especial pleasure to see that my irons were made secure. I scorned to question the dirty rascals further as to how my cousin came to be in command, but I guessed there had been some foul work on board since the vessel had left Yarmouth; and the next morning I learnt the whole story.

Old Muzzy, my firm friend, had been ashore all that night, very drunk, but soon after dawn he came off to the ship, and hearing of my plight, at once betook himself to where I was imprisoned. He embraced me very heartily, and as soon as I had satisfied him as to my recovery and subsequent adventures, he disclosed to me the situation of the *Fair Maid*.

"You see it's like this, my boy. Mr. Sims is a good seaman, no one can't say he's not, but he's too much of a lawyer to handle a craft like this. Now that cousin of yours, though he be a bloodthirsty, revengeful beast, as you should know by this time, yet he's no lawyer. Captain Sims, there, he was all for letters of marque and such, but then, once a peace breaks out, where's your letters of marque? They ain't no more use than so much ballast. Now when we came out here, the lieutenant he says, 'Let's go into Gheriah, and join the pirates there' – though according to him they aren't what you may call pirates, being under a king of their own, who has as much right to give them commissions as King George himself. But Captain Sims he wouldn't hear of it, the more so as there was a British squadron under Commodore Porter had been out from Bombay in the spring, and knocked some of their forts about their ears for them. But, you see, unless we joined them, we had nothing to do till such time as the war began again, unless we chose to take the risk of standing up and down the coast, as you may say, on our own hook. So the crew they sided with the lieutenant, that's your cousin, and the end of it was there was a sort of a mutiny, and Captain Sims he was carried ashore at Gheriah and given up to the pirates, leastways to their king, and the lieutenant took his place."

"Then the long and short of it is that this is a pirate ship," was all I could say.

"Well, we are, and, in a manner of speaking, we aren't. When we want to come into Bombay here we sail under King George's flag, and when we're in company with the pirates we fly theirs. Any way, we've taken two Dutch ships and an English one since we got out here, and that's put money in our pockets, which is more than Captain Sims would have done with his lawyering."

"And I suppose I am to be carried to Gheriah and given up to the pirates, like Mr. Sims," I said bitterly.

But this the boatswain swore with many oaths he would not permit. Nevertheless I could see that he was strongly attached to my cousin's interest, and not disposed to venture anything openly against him. Indeed, he tried very hard to persuade me to come into their plans, offering to reconcile me with Rupert if I would consent to do this. To these proposals, however, I would by no means consent, being more experienced by this time than when I had joined them at Yarmouth, and having a pretty shrewd notion of how Mr. Clive would regard my former comrades if they should fall into his hands. Finally, I besought the boatswain for news of Marian.

He drew a grave face at this name.

"Athelstane, lad, I would rather you'd ask me any other question than that. Plague take the girl, she was the cause of all the mischief between you and the lieutenant! Forget her, lad, forget her, she's not worth your troubling after."

But he might as well have pressed me to forget who I was, and the situation into which my eagerness to hear of Marian had brought me.

Finding me resolute to know about her, he told me this much: —

"She came aboard while the *Fair Maid* was in the river, to nurse your cousin as he lay ill of his wounds. But I believe he had been tempting her before that to come out to the Indies with him, and she held back for him to go to church with her first, and this he didn't care enough for her to do. Anyhow, it ended in his getting round her to trust herself with him, and he swore he would carry her straight to Calcutta and hand her over to her people there. When we got out here, and she found he had no such purpose, but meant to keep her in the fortress as long as it suited his pleasure, there was a terrible business betwixt them. But you know what the lieutenant is, and that it ain't a few tears from a woman that'll turn him from anything he has a mind to do. So he just set her ashore by force, and there she is, as much a prisoner as Mr. Sims himself."

I was overcome with the horror of this news, though I suppose it was what I should have expected from my cousin's character.

"Good heavens!" I cried out in my distraction. "Do you mean that she is in the hands of the pirates at Gheriah?"

"That's about what it comes to. And the sooner you give up all thoughts of her the better for you, says I."

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.