

***ALLEN  
UPWARD***



***ATHELSTANE  
FORD***



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# **Athelstane Ford**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I

COUSIN RUPERT GAINS A RECRUIT

## CHAPTER II

THE TAVERN OF THE "THREE-DECKER"

## CHAPTER III

THE BEGINNING OF THE RIVALRY

## CHAPTER IV

" À LA MORT "

## CHAPTER V

ON BOARD THE KING'S SHIP

## CHAPTER VI

IN THE POWER OF THE ENEMY

## CHAPTER VII

THE SIEGE OF GHERIAH

## CHAPTER VIII

IN THE COMPANY'S SERVICE

## CHAPTER IX

THE SPY

## CHAPTER X

TAKEN CAPTIVE

## CHAPTER XI

THE BLACK HOLE

## CHAPTER XII

RUPERT IN A NEW LIGHT

## CHAPTER XIII

A NIGHT ADVENTURE



CHAPTER XIV

IN A STRANGE LAND

CHAPTER XV

THE COMING OF SABAT JUNG

CHAPTER XVI

A BATTLE IN THE DARK

CHAPTER XVII

A MISSION OF DANGER

CHAPTER XVIII

MEER JAFFIER'S OATH

CHAPTER XIX

PLASSY

CHAPTER XX

RETRIBUTION

CHAPTER XXI

COLONEL CLIVE'S MESSAGE

CHAPTER XXII

AFTER MANY DAYS

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# CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

## COUSIN RUPERT GAINS A RECRUIT

Table of Contents

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 on 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

[Table of Contents](#)

### THE TAVERN OF THE “THREE-DECKER”

[Table of Contents](#)

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

## Table of Contents

# THE BEGINNING OF THE RIVALRY

## Table of Contents

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.

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