WILLIAM HENRY GILES KINGSTON

WILL WEATHERHELM: THE YARN OF AN OLD SAILOR

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Will Weatherhelm: The Yarn of an Old Sailor

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"Will Weatherhelm"

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My father, Eric Wetherholm, was a Shetlander. He was born in the Isle of Unst, the most northern of those far-off islands, the Shetlands. He loved his native land, though it might be said to be somewhat backward in point of civilisation; though no trees are to be found in it much larger than gooseberry bushes, or cattle bigger than sheep; though its climate is moist and windy, and its winter days but of a few hours’ duration. But, in spite of these drawbacks, it possesses many points to love, many to remember. Wild and romantic, and, in some places, grand scenery, lofty and rocky precipices, sunny downs and steep hills, deep coves with clear water, in which the sea-trout can

be seen swimming in shoals, and, better still, kind, honest, warm hearts, modest women with sweet smiles, and true, honest men.

Once only in my youth was I there. I remember well, on a bright summer's day, standing on one of the highest of its lofty hills, sprinkled with thousands of beautiful wild-flowers, and as I looked over the hundreds of isles and islets of every variety of form, grouping round the mainland, as the largest island is called, I thought that in all my wanderings I had never seen a greener or more lovely spot floating on a surface of brighter blue; truly I felt proud of the region which my poor father claimed as the place of his birth. I knew very little of his early history. Like the larger proportion of Shetland men, he followed the sea from his boyhood, and made several voyages, on board a whaler, to Baffin's Bay. Once his ship had been nipped by the ice, whirled helplessly against an iceberg, when he alone with two companions escaped the destruction which overwhelmed her. Finally he returned home, and, sickened of voyages in icy regions, became mate of a merchantman trading out of the port of Hull round the English coast. On one occasion, his brig having received severe damage in a heavy gale, put into Plymouth harbour to obtain repairs. He there met an old shipmate, John Trevelyn, who had given up the sea and settled with his family on shore.

John had a daughter, Jannet Trevelyn, and a sweet, good girl I am very certain she must have been. Before the brig sailed my father obtained her promise to marry him. He shortly returned, when she became his wife, and accompanied him to Shetland. But the damp, cold climate of

that northern land was a sore trial to her constitution, accustomed, as she had been, to the soft air of her native Devonshire, and she entreated that he would rather take her with him to sea than leave her there. Fortunately, as he considered it, the owners of the brig he had served in offered him the command of another of their vessels, and he was able to fulfil the wishes of his wife, as well as to please his own inclination, though for her sake he would rather have left her in safety on shore, for he too well knew all the dangers and hardships of the sea to desire to expose her to them.

My father had very few surviving relatives. His mother and sister were the only two of whom I know. His father and two brothers had been lost in the Greenland fishery, and several of his uncles and cousins had been scattered about in different parts of the world, never to return to their native islands. When, therefore, he found that Shetland would not suit my mother’s health, he tried to persuade my grandmother and Aunt Bretta to accompany him to Devonshire. After many doubts and misgivings as to how they could possibly live in that warm country far away to the south among a strange people, who could not understand a word of Erse, they at length, for love of him and his young wife, agreed to do as he wished. As soon as he was able he fetched them from Shetland to Hull, whence he conveyed them to Plymouth in his own vessel, and left them very comfortably settled in a little house of their own in the outskirts of the town. Though small, it was neat and pleasant, and they soon got accustomed to the change, though they complained at first that the days in summer

were very short compared to those in their own country. This was the year before I was born. My mother, though she had now a home where she could have remained, was so reconciled to a sea life, and so fond, I may say, of my father, that she preferred living on board his vessel to the enjoyment of all the comforts of the shore. On one memorable occasion, a new brig he commanded, called the *Jannet Trevelyn*, in compliment to my mother, was bound round from Hull to Cork harbour in Ireland, and was to have put into Plymouth to land her, seeing that she was not in a fit state to continue the voyage, when a heavy south-westerly gale came on, and the brig was driven up channel again off the Isle of Wight. During its continuance, while the brig was pitching, bows under, with close-reefed topsails only on her, with a heavy sea running, the sky as black as pitch, the ocean a mass of foam, and with the wind howling and whistling as if eager to carry the masts out of her, I was born. My poor mother had a heavy time of it, and it was a mercy she did not die. But oftentimes delicate, fragile-looking women go through far more than apparently strong and robust persons. She had a fine spirit and patient temper, and what is more, she put a firm trust in One who is all-powerful to save those who have faith in him, both for this life and for eternity.

The brig was hove-to, and though more than once she narrowly escaped being run down by ships coming up Channel, she finally reached Plymouth, and my mother and I were landed in safety. Thus I may say that I have been at sea from my earliest days. Old Mrs Wetherholm was delighted to receive my poor mother and me, and took the

very fondest care of us, as did Aunt Bretta, while my father proceeded on his voyage.

Soon after this I was christened under a name which may sound somewhat fine to southern ears, Willand Wetherholm; but, as will be seen, I did not very long retain it.

My mother had another trial soon after this. My grandfather, John Trevelyn, who had for some time been ailing, died and left her without any relations that I ever heard of on his or her mother's side of the house. Thus she became more than ever dependent on my father and his mother and sister. She had no cause to regret this, however, for kinder, gentler-hearted people never existed.

Two years more passed away, and I throve and grew strong and fat, and what between grandmother, and mother, and aunt, ran a great chance of being spoilt. My father had been so frightened about my mother before, that he would never take her to sea again; but he often said that he would endeavour, when he had laid by a little more money, to give it up himself and to come and live with her on shore. It is a dream of happiness in which many a poor sailor indulges, but how few are able to realise! He was expected round at Plymouth, on his way to the Mediterranean, but day after day passed and he did not arrive. My mother began to grow very anxious, so did my grandmother and aunt. A terrific gale had been blowing for some days, when the Eddystone was nearly washed away, and fearful damage was done to shipping in various parts.

At length the news reached them that the brig had put into Salcombe range. It is a wild-looking yet land-locked harbour on the Devonshire coast. Black rocks rise sheer up

out of the water on either side of the entrance, and give it a particularly melancholy and unattractive appearance. One of the owners had come round in the brig, but he had landed and taken a post-chaise back towards London. In the morning the brig sailed, and by noon the gale was blowing with its fiercest violence. In vain my poor mother watched and waited for his return; from that time to the present neither my father nor any of his crew were again heard of. The brig with all hands must have foundered, or, as likely as not, been run down at no great distance from Plymouth itself. My mother, who had borne so bravely and uncomplainingly her own personal sufferings, sunk slowly but surely under this dispensation of Providence. She never found fault with the decrees of the Almighty, but the colour fled from her cheeks, her figure grew thinner and thinner. Scarce a smile lighted up her countenance, even when she fondly played with me. Her complaint was incurable, it was that of a broken heart, and I was left an orphan.

Most of my father's property had gone to purchase a share in the brig, which had been most fatally uninsured, and thus an income remained barely sufficient for the support of my grandmother and aunt. They, poor things, took in work, and laboured hard, night and day, that they might supply me with the food and clothing they considered I required, and, when I grew older, to afford me such an education as they deemed suitable to the son of one holding the position my father had in life Aunt Bretta taught me to read pretty well, and to write a little, and I was then sent to a day-school to pick up some knowledge of arithmetic and geography. Small enough was the amount I gained of either,

and whether it was owing to my teacher’s bad system or to my own stupidity, I don’t know, but I do know that I very quickly lost all I gained, and by the time I was twelve years old I was a strong, stout lad, with a large appetite and a very ill-stored head.

Though I had not picked up much information at school, I had some companions, and they were generally the wildest and least manageable of all the boys of my age and standing. The truth was, I am forced to confess, my grandmother and aunt had spoilt me. They could not find it in their hearts to deny me anything, and the consequence was that I generally got my own way whether it was a good or bad one. I should have been altogether ruined had they not set me a good example, and instilled into my mind the principles of religion. Often the lessons they taught me were forgotten, and years passed away, when some circumstance recalled them to my mind, and they brought forth a portion, if not all, of the fruits they desired. Still I grew up a wayward, headstrong boy. I heard some friends say that my heart was in its right place, and that I should never come to much harm, and that satisfied me; so I did pretty well what I liked without any qualms of conscience or fears for the consequences.

I am not going to describe any of my youthful pranks, because I suspect that no good will come from my so doing. If I did not reap all the evil consequences I deserved, others might fancy that they may do the same with like impunity and find themselves terribly mistaken. One of my chief associates was a boy of my own age, called Charles Iffley. His mother, like mine, was a Devonshire woman, and his

father was mate of a merchantman belonging to the port of Hull, but trading sometimes to Plymouth, and frequently to ports up the Straits of Gibraltar. Charley and I had many tastes in common. He was a bold dashing fellow, with plenty of pluck, and what those who disliked him called impudence. One thing no one could deny, that he was just the fellow to stand by a friend at a pinch, and that, blow high or blow low, he was always the same, merry-hearted, open-handed, and kind. These qualities, however, valuable as they are, if not backed by right principle and true religion, too often in time of temptation have been known miserably to fail. On a half-holiday, or whenever we could get away from school, Charley and I used to steal down to the harbour, and we generally managed to borrow a boat for a sail, or we induced one of our many acquaintances among the watermen to take us along with him to help him pull, so that we soon learned to handle an oar as well as any lads of our age, as also pretty fairly to sail a boat. When we returned home late in an evening, and I went back to supper, my poor old grandmother would complain bitterly of the anxiety I had caused her; and when I saw her grief, I used to promise to amend, but I am sorry to say that when temptation came in my way I forgot my promise and repeated my fault.

At length the schooner to which Charley's father belonged came into Plymouth harbour. I went on board with my friend, and he showed me all over her; I thought her a very fine vessel, and how much I should like to go to sea in her. The next day he appeared at our house in great glee, and told my grandmother and Aunt Bretta that he had come

to wish them good-bye, that his father had bound him apprentice to the owners of the schooner, and that he was to go to sea in her that very voyage. I was sorry to part with him, and I could not help envying him for being able to start at once to see the world. When he was gone, I could talk of nothing else but of what Charley was going to see, and of what he was going to do; and I never ceased trying to persuade my grandmother and aunt to let me go and be a sailor also. Poor things, I little thought of the grief I was causing them.

“Willand, my dear laddie, ye ken that your father, and your grandfather, and two uncles were all sailors, and were lost at sea,—indeed, I may well say that such has been the hard lot of all the males of our line,—then why should ye wish without reason or necessity to go and do the same, and break your old grandmother’s heart, who loves ye far better than her own life’s blood,” said the kind old lady, taking me in her arms and pressing me to her bosom. “Be content to stay at home, laddie, and make her happy.”

“Oh, that ye will, Willand dear,” chimed in Aunt Bretta; “we’ll get a wee shoppie for ye, and may be ye’ll become a great merchant, or we’ll just rent a croft up the country here, and ye shall keep cows, and sheep, and fowls, and ye shall plough, and sow, and reap, and be happy as the day is long. Won’t that be the best life for Willand, grannie? It’s what he is just fitted for, and there isn’t another like it.”

I shook my head. All these pictures of rural felicity or of mercantile grandeur had no charms for me. I had set my heart on being a rover, and seeing all parts of the world, and I believe that had I been offered a lucrative post under

Government with nothing to do, without a moment's hesitation I should have rejected it, lest it might have prevented me from carrying my project into execution. Still for some time I did not like to say anything more on the subject, and the kind creatures began to hope that I had given up my wishes to their remonstrances. Had they from the first taught me the important lessons of self-denial and obedience, they might have found that I was willing to do so; but I had no idea of sacrificing my own wishes to those of others, and I still held firmly to my resolution of leaving home on the first opportunity.

I was one day walking down High Street, Plymouth, when I saw advancing towards me a fine sailor-like looking lad, with a well-bronzed jovial countenance.

"Why, Will, old boy, you don't seem to know me," he exclaimed, stretching out his hand, which seemed as hard as iron.

"Why, I scarcely did, Charley, till I heard your voice," I answered, shaking him warmly by the hand. "You've grown from a boy almost into a man. There's nothing like the life of a sailor for hardening a fellow, and making him fit for anything. I see that plainly."

"Then come to sea with me at once," he replied; "I can get you a berth aboard our schooner, and we'll have a merry life of it altogether, that we will."

I liked his confident and self-satisfied way of talking; but I said I was afraid I could not take advantage of his offer, though I would try and get leave from my grandmother.

"Leave from your grandmother!" he exclaimed with a taunting laugh; "take French leave from the old lady. You are

far better able to judge what you like than she is, and she can’t expect to tie you to her apron-strings all your life, can she?”

“No, but she is very kind and good to me, and I’m young yet to leave her and Aunt Bretta. Perhaps, when I am older, she will not object to my going away,” I replied.

“Pooh, pooh! feeds you with bread and milk, and lollipops; and as to being too young—why, you are not much more than a year younger than I am, and fully as stout, and I should like to know who would venture to say that I am not fit to go to sea. I would soon show him which was the best man of the two.”

These remarks, for I will not call them reasons, had a great effect on me. I thought Charley the finest fellow I had ever known, and I promised to be guided by him entirely. I did not consider how ungrateful and foolish I was. How could he really care about me, or know what was for my best interests? He only thought of pleasing himself by getting a companion whom he knew from experience he could generally induce to do what he liked. I forgot all the love and affection, all the tender care I had received from my grandmother and aunt since my birth, and that I ought on every account to have consulted their feelings and opinions on the most important step I had hitherto taken in life. Instead of this, I made up my mind if they should say no, as Charley expressed it, to cut my stick and run. Many have done as I did, and bitterly repented their folly and ingratitude every day afterwards to the end of their lives. It stands to reason that those who have brought us up and watched over us in helpless infancy or in sickness,

instructed us and fitted us to enter on the active duties of life, must feel far greater interest in our future welfare than can any other person. We, as boys, are deeply interested in a shrub or a tree we have planted, in a dog we have brought up from a puppy; and we may be certain that our parents or guardians are far more interested in our welfare, and therefore I repeat, do not go and follow my example, and run counter to their advice and wishes.

I spent the afternoon with Charley Iffley on board the *Kite* schooner, of which his father was mate. She was a fine craft, with a handsomely fitted up cabin. She had been a privateer in the last war, and still carried six brass guns on deck, which were bright and polished, and took my fancy amazingly. She also had a long mahogany tiller bound with brass, and with a handsomely carved head of a kite which I much admired. These things, trifles as they were, made me still more desire to belong to so dandy-looking a craft. The captain was on shore, but Mr Iffley, the mate, did the honours of the vessel, and talked largely of all her good qualities, and finally told me that for the sake of his son, who was my best friend, if I had a mind to go to sea, he would make interest to get me apprenticed to her owners. I did not exactly understand what that signified; but I thanked him very much, and said that I left the matter in his and his son’s hands.

“All right, Will, we’ll make a sailor of you before long!” exclaimed Charley, clapping me on the back.

Mr Iffley was not a person, from his appearance, very well calculated to win the confidence of a young lad. He was a stout, short man, with huge, red, carroty whiskers, and a

pock-marked face, small ferretty eyes, a round knob for a nose, and thick lips, which he smacked loudly both when speaking and after eating and drinking. However, Charley seemed to hold him in a good deal of respect and awe, an honour my friend did not pay to many people. This I found was owing much to the liberal allowance of rope-end which the mate dealt out to his son whenever he neglected his duty, or did anything else to displease him; but of course Master Charley did not confide this fact to me, but allowed me to discover it for myself. In the evening I went back to my grandmother's. I wanted Charley to accompany me, but he said that he thought he had better keep out of the way, or out of sight. This I have since found the Tempter—that great enemy of man—always does when he can. He does his best to hide the hook with which he angles for souls, as well as to conceal himself; and we may justly be suspicious of people who dare not come forward to explain their objects and intentions regarding us. Even in a worldly point of view, the caution I give is very necessary. It was not, however, till long, long after that I found all this out. I had not been seated at the tea-table many minutes before I opened the subject which lay nearest my heart. My kind grandmother and Aunt Bretta used all the arguments they could think of to induce me to stay at home, and so powerful and reasonable did they seem, that had I not been ashamed of facing Charley and confessing that I was defeated, I should, at all events for the time, have yielded to their wishes. They pictured to me all the horrors of being shipwrecked and being cast on a barren island, or tossed about at sea on a raft, or having to live among savages, or being half starved

or parched with thirst,—indeed, they had little difficulty in finding subjects on which to enlarge. They also reminded me that, as I had no friends and no interest, if I went to sea they could do nothing for me, and that though Mr Iffley might be a very kind man, he could not be expected to care so much for me as he would for his own son, and perhaps I might have to remain before the mast all my life. All this I knew was very true, but I could not bear the idea of being laughed at by Charley and his father, and in my eagerness I swore vehemently that go to sea I would, in spite of everything they could say; and I declared that I didn’t mind though I might be cast away a dozen times, or go wandering about the ocean and never come back,—indeed, I scarcely know what wicked and foolish things I said on the occasion.

My poor grandmother and aunt were dreadfully shocked at the way I had expressed myself. They had too much respect for an oath themselves, even though it was as rash as mine, to endeavour to make me break it, and with tears streaming down her face my grandmother told me, that if such was my resolution, she had no longer the wish to oppose it. There was something very sad in her countenance, and the words trembled on her lips as she spoke, I remember. It was not so much, however, because of my wish to go to sea, as of my rank ingratitude and want of tenderness.

“Oh, Willand! ye dinna ken what harm ye have done, laddie,” said Aunt Bretta, as I parted from her to go to roost in my little attic room, which she had fitted up so neatly for my use.

At first I was inclined to exult at having made the first step towards the accomplishment of my wishes, and I was thinking how proud I should be when I met Charley the next morning, to be able to tell him that I had triumphed over all difficulties and was ready to accept his offer; but then the recollection of what Aunt Bretta had said, and a consciousness of the nature of my own conduct came over me, and I began to be sorry for what I had done. In the morning, however, before breakfast, Charley called for me, and when I told him that I had got leave to go, he said he would come in and comfort the poor women. This he did in a rough kind of way. He told them that we were going to make only a short summer voyage—out to the Mediterranean and back; that if I liked it I might then be apprenticed, and if not, that I might come on shore; that I should have seen a little of the world, and that no great harm would be done.

The matter once settled, no people could have exerted themselves more than did my two kind relatives to get me ready for sea. They knew exactly what was wanted, and in three or four days my entire kit was ready and stowed away in a small sea-chest, which had belonged to some member of my family who had escaped drowning. It received no little commendation when it was hoisted up the side of the *Kite*.

“That’s what I like,” said Mr Iffley; “traps enough, and no more. It speaks well for your womankind, and shows that you come of a sea-going race.”

I told him that I was born at sea, and that my father was drowned at sea.

“That’s better than being hung on shore,” he answered with a loud laugh; and I afterwards found that such had

been the fate of his father, who was a noted pirate, and that he himself had enjoyed the doubtful benefit of his instruction for some time.

While we lay at Plymouth we received orders to call in at Falmouth, to carry a cargo of pilchards, which was ready for us, to Naples, in the south of Italy. The people in that country, being Roman Catholics and having to fast, eat a great quantity of salt-fish. They have plenty of fish in their own waters, but they are so lazy that they will not be at the trouble of catching them in sufficient quantities to supply their wants. Falmouth was a great fishing place in those days, and full of vessels going to all parts of the world. There had been some heavy rain in the night, and as they lay with their sails loosed and the flags of all the civilised nations in the world flying from their peaks, I thought that I had never seen a more beautiful sight.

Mr Tooke, our captain, was a very good sailor. He was a tall, fine man, with black hair and huge whiskers, like his mate’s, and a voice, when he liked, as loud as thunder—a quality on which he not a little prided himself. I thought when I went on board that I was to live in the cabin and be treated like a young gentleman. Charley had not said anything about the matter, but he had showed me the state rooms, as they were called, and I had sat down in the cabin and taken a glass of wine with him there, so I took it for granted that I was to be a sort of midshipman on board.

The first night, when the middle watch was set, and I began to grow very sleepy, I asked Charley in which of the cabins I should find my bed. He laughed, and told me to follow him. I did so, and he slipped down a little hatchway

forward, just stopping a minute, with his head and shoulders above the deck, to tell me that I must not be too squeamish or particular, and that I should soon get accustomed to the place to which he was going to take me. He then disappeared, and I went after him. I found myself in a dark hole, lighted by a very dim lantern, with shelves which are called standing bed-places, one above the other, all round it, and sea-chests lashed below. In the fore part were two berths, rather darker and closer than the rest.

“That’s where you and I have to sleep, old boy,” said Charley. “I didn’t like it at first; but now I would just as soon sleep there as anywhere else. But, I say, don’t make any complaints; no one will pity you if you do, and you will only be laughed at for your pains.”

I found that he was right with regard to my getting accustomed to the place, though sheets were unknown, and cleanliness or decency were but little attended to. Not only were the habits of many of the crew dirty, but their manners and ideas were bad, and their language most foul and obscene; cursing and swearing went on all day long, just as a thing of course. It might seem strange to some who don’t know much about human nature, that I, a lad decently brought up by good, religious people, and fairly educated, should have willingly submitted to live along with such people. At first I was startled,—I won’t say shocked,—but then I thought it fine and manly, and soon got not only accustomed to hear such language, but to use it with perfect indifference myself.

We are all of us more apt to learn what is bad than what is good I have mentioned Captain Tooke and our first mate.

We had a second mate, old Tom Cole by name. He was close upon sixty years of age. He had been at sea all his life, and had been master of more than one vessel, but lost them through drunkenness, till he got such a name that no owners would entrust him with the command of another. He was a good seaman and a fair navigator, and when he was sober there wasn't a better man in the ship. He had been to sea as first mate, but lost the berth through his besetting sin. I believe Captain Tooke engaged him from having known him when he himself was a young man, and from believing that he could keep him sober. He succeeded pretty well, but not always; and more than once, in consequence of old Cole's neglect of his duty, we very nearly lost our lives, as many lives have been lost before and since. The two mates messed with the captain, but the apprentices lived entirely with the men forward. Besides Charles Iffley, there was another, Jacob La Motte, a Guernsey lad. He was a far more quiet and steady fellow than either of us. In my wiser moments I learned to like him better than Iffley; and perhaps because I was better educated than most of the men, and, except when led away by bad example, more inclined to be rational, he associated more with me than with them. The best educated and the most steady among the hands forward was a young man, Edward Seton. He was very well-mannered and neat in his person, and I never heard him giving way to profane swearing or any other gross conduct, and he tried, but in vain to check those who indulged in it.

I had not been long at sea, though time enough to have any pride I might have possessed knocked out of me, when I

was accosted by old Ned Toggles, one of the roughest of the rough hands on board, and generally considered the wit of the crew, with, “And what’s your name, youngster? Did any one ever think it worth while to give one to such a shrimp as you?”

“Yes,” said I, firing up a little; “I should have thought you knew it by this time.”

“Know it! How should I know whether your name is Jack, or Tom, or Bill? Any one on ’em is too good for you, I should think, to look at you,” remarked old Toggles, with a grin and a wink at his companions.

“Thank you for nothing,” said I, feeling very indignant at the gratuitous insult, as I considered it, thus offered to me. “If you want to know my name, I’ll tell it you. It is Willand Wetherholm.” The last words I uttered with no little emphasis, while I looked at my shipmates as much as to say, “There! I should like to know who has got as good a name as that!” I saw a grin on the countenance of old Toggles as I spoke.

“Will Weatherhelm!” he ejaculated. “A capital name, lad. Hurrah for Will Weatherhelm. Remember, Will Weatherhelm is to be your name to the end of your days. Come, no nonsense, we’ll mark it into you, my boy. Come, give us your arm.” What he meant by this I could not tell; but after a little resistance, I found that I must give in. “Come, it’s our watch below, and we have plenty of time to spare; we’ll set about it at once,” said he, taking my arm and baring it up to the elbow. One of the other men then held me while Toggles procured a sharp needle, stuck in a handle, and began puncturing the thick part of my arm between the elbow and

wrist. The operation cost me some little pain; but there was no use crying out, so I bore it patiently. When he had done he brought some powdered charcoal or gunpowder, and rubbed it thoroughly over the arm. “There, my lad,” said he, “don’t go and wash it off, unless you want a good rope’s-ending, and you’ll see what will come of it.”

I waited patiently as I was bid, though my arm smarted not a little, and in three days Toggles told me I might wash as much as I liked. I did wash, and there I found on my arm, indelibly marked, my new name, “Will Weatherhelm!” and at sea, wherever I have been, it has ever since stuck to me.

Note. Weather helm is a sea term. A vessel, when not in perfect trim and too light aft, has a tendency, when on a wind, to luff of her own accord, or to fly up into the wind. To counteract this tendency it is necessary to keep the helm a-weather, and she is then said to carry a *weather helm*. It is not surprising, therefore, that Toggles should at once catch at my name, and turn it into one which is so familiar to a seaman’s ear. Indeed, to this day, I have often to stop and consider which is my proper name, and certainly could not avoid answering to that of Will Weatherhelm.

If one of my old shipmates were to be asked if he knew Willand Wetherholm, he would certainly say, “No; never heard of such a man.”

“But don’t you remember Will Weatherhelm?”

“I should think so, my boy,” would be his reply, and I hope he would say something in my favour.

We had a quick run to the southward till we were somewhere off the latitude of Lisbon, when a gale sprung up from the eastward which drove us off the land, and not only

carried every stitch of canvas clear of the bolt-ropes, but very nearly took the masts out of the vessel. It was my watch below when the gale came on, and I was awoke by the terrific blows which the schooner received on her bows; and what with the darkness and the confusion caused by the noise of the sea and the rattling of the blocks aloft, the stamp of feet overhead, and the creaking of the bulk-heads, I fully believed the ship was going down, and that my last moment had come. I thought of my poor old grandmother's warnings, and I would have given anything if I could have recalled my oath and found myself once more safe by her side. "All hands shorten sail!" soon sounded in my ears. I slipped into my clothes in a moment, and hastened on deck. The sky overhead was as black as pitch, and looked as if it was coming down to crush the vessel between it and the ocean, and every now and then vivid flashes of lightning darted forth from it, playing round the rigging and showing the huge black seas as they came rolling up like walls capped with white foaming tops, with a loud rushing roar, as if they were about to overwhelm us. A rope's-end applied to my back made me start, and I heard the voice of old Cole, saying, "Hillo, youngster, what are you dreaming about? Up aloft there, and help furl the topsails." Aloft I went, though I thought every moment that I should be blown away or shaken from the shrouds; and when I got on the yards, I had to hold with teeth and eyelids, as the saying is, and very little use I suspect I was of. Still the sails, or rather what remained of them, were furled, and I had been aloft in a gale. I very soon learned to think nothing of it.

We were many days regaining our lost ground, and it was three weeks after leaving Falmouth before we sighted the Rock of Gibraltar. We did not stop there, but the wind being then fair, ran on through the Gut towards our destination. Inside the straits, we had light and baffling winds, and found ourselves drifted over to the African shore, not far from the Riff Coast. We kept a sharp look-out and had our guns ready shotted, for the gentry thereabouts have a trick of coming off in their fast-pulling boats if they see an unarmed merchantman becalmed; and, as a spider does a fly caught in his web, carrying her off and destroying her. They are very expeditious in their proceedings. They either cut the throats of the crew or sell them into slavery, carry all the cargo, and rigging, and stores on shore, and burn the hull, that no trace of their prize may remain. Charley told me this; but we agreed, as we were well armed, if they came off to us, they might find that they had caught a Tartar.

The captain and mates had their glasses constantly turned towards the shore. The sun was already sinking towards the west, when I heard the captain exclaim, “Here they come! Now, my lads, let’s see what you are made of.” We all, on this, gave a loud cheer, and I could see six or eight dark specks just stealing out clear of the land. Charley and I were in high glee at the near prospect of a skirmish, for we both of us had a great fancy for smelling gunpowder.

Old Cole heard us boasting of what we would do. “Just wait, my boys, till you see some hundreds of those ugly blackamoors, with their long pikes, poking away at you, and climbing up the side of the schooner, and you will have

reason to change your tone, I suspect," said he, as he turned on his heel away from us.

"Here comes a breeze off the land!" exclaimed Mr Iffley; "we may wish the blackguards good-bye before they come up with us." The breeze came and sent us a few fathoms through the water, and then died away and left the sails flapping as before idly against the masts, while at the same time the row-boats came nearer and nearer. The captain walked the deck with his glass under his arm, every now and then giving a glance at the approaching boats, and then holding up his hand to ascertain if the breeze was coming back again. Once more the sails filled, and his countenance brightened. Stronger and stronger came the breeze. The schooner felt its force, and now began to rush gaily through the water. "Hurrah! she walks along briskly!" he exclaimed, looking over the side. "We may wish the gentlemen in the boats good evening."

I was surprised to find the captain so glad to get away from the pirates. I thought it was somewhat cowardly of him, and that he would rather have stopped and fought them. Charley laughed when I told him this. "He is as brave a man as ever stepped," he answered. "He has his own business to attend to, and that is to carry his cargo to the port we are bound for. What good would he have got had he fought the pirates, even though he had knocked them to pieces?"

The breeze continuing, and darkness coming on, we very soon lost sight of the boats. It was nearly a fortnight after this that we made the coast of Sicily, and saw Mount Etna towering up with a flaming top into the clouds. We stood on

towards the Bay of Naples. A bright mist hung over the land as we approached it soon after sunrise, like a veil of gauze, but still thick enough entirely to conceal all objects from our view. Suddenly, as if obeying the command of an enchanter’s wand, it lifted slowly before us and revealed a scene more beautiful that any I ever expected to behold. On the right was the bright green island of Capri, with Sorrento and its ruined columns beyond it. Before us was the gay white city of Naples, with its castles and moles below rising upwards out of the blue sparkling waters on the side of a hill, amid orange groves and vineyards, and crowned at its summit by a frowning fortress, while on the left was the wildly picturesque island of Procida and the promontory of Baiae, every spot of which was full of classic associations, which, however, the little knowledge I had picked up was scarcely sufficient to enable me to appreciate, and in which even now, I must own, I could not take the interest they deserve. Still the beauty of the scene fixed itself on my memory never to be eradicated.

Chapter Two.

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Having discharged our cargo at Naples, the captain, finding that we could get no freight home from thence at the time, determined to go to Smyrna, where he knew that he could obtain one of dried fruit, figs, currants, and raisins. We spent ten days there, and on our homeward voyage, keeping somewhat to the northward of our course, got among the islands of the Greek Archipelago. At that time a great many of the petty Greek chiefs, driven by the Turks from their hereditary domains, had established themselves on any rocky island they could find, with as many followers as they could collect, and nothing loth, used to carry on the respectable avocation of pirates. Some possessed only lateen-rigged craft, or open boats, but others owned fine large vessels, ships and brigs, strongly armed and manned. Though they attacked any Turkish vessels wherever they could find them, they were in no respect particular, if compelled by necessity to look out for other prey, and the merchantmen of any civilised nation which came in their way had but a small chance of escape.

I observed some little anxiety on the countenances of the officers, and a more careful watch than usual was kept on board at night, while in the day-time the captain or first mate was constantly aloft, and more than once the course was changed to avoid a strange sail. The winds were light and baffling, so that we were detained among the islands for some time. At last we got a fair breeze from the northward, though it was light, and we were congratulating ourselves that we should have a quick run to the westward. We had been standing on for a couple of hours or so, when I

saw the master and mates looking out anxiously ahead. I asked Charley Iffley what it was they saw.

“An ugly-looking big brig, which has a cut they don’t like about her,” was the answer. “When we were out here the last time, we sighted just such another chap. A hundred or more cut-throat-looking fellows were dancing on her decks, and we had every expectation that they would lay us aboard, when a man-of-war hove in sight, and she prudently cut her stick. The man-of-war made chase, but a Thames barge might as well have tried to catch a wherry. The pirate was out of sight in no time.”

“But if this stranger should prove to be a gentleman of the same profession, what shall we do, Charley?” I asked.

“Run away if we can, and fight him if he comes up with us,” he replied.

I thought he did not seem quite so anxious about fighting as he had been when we were off the Riff coast. Indeed, from what I could learn, should the vessel in sight prove to be a Greek pirate, we might find a struggle with her no joking matter. That she was so, I found the captain and officers entertained not the slightest doubt. The schooner was brought on a wind and stood away to the southward, but the brig immediately afterwards changed her course for the same direction. The captain on this called the crew aft, and told us that he intended to try and make his escape, but that if he did not succeed, we must fight for our lives, for if overcome we should all have our throats cut. Charley and I, and La Motte, gave a shrill cheer, in which we were joined by two or three of the other men, but the old hands merely growled out, “Never fear; no man wants to get his throat