

Jeremy York.

Beach street was in those days much as it is now, the quaintest, saltiest, imaginable thoroughfare on the coast of Great Britain; littered with anchors of all sizes, with huge coils of hempen cable, with odd fantastic capstans for the winding up of boats, with tall poles for the spreading of nets, lines from window to window for the easy drying of linen, queer dusky alleys leading at night-time into a true smuggling blackness of atmosphere; beerhouse after beerhouse in friendly juxtaposition, with a perpetual seething and hissing of surf upon the steep shingle as a regale to the ear, and miles of sand plains beyond billowing to Sandwich, and sweet and musical into late autumn daytime with wild-flowers of fifty different sorts and birds of all kinds.

It was now about nine o'clock in the evening; there was no moon, the starlight made no sheen, and the sea brimmed in tremulous ebony to its confines. The few oil lamps in Beach Street threw a feeble gleam upon the shingly road; but how full of people Deal was on this particular night, York might have gathered from the groups of men showing through every tavern window he passed; drinking, arguing, singing, capercutting, as Jack will when newly come ashore, amid motionless fogs of tobacco-smoke. The first sign his eye caught was that of the Kentish Sickle. He entered the place, and found it crowded with boatmen and seamen. The landlord, a purplefaced man, who had removed his wig for air, and yet looked half dead with heat, stood behind a little bar or counter drawing ale out of a cask, the top of which was on a level with his hand. York inquired if he could have a bed; the landlord shook his head, with a glance at the tall youth, as though he suspected a kind of impertinence in such a question in the face of the crowd of people smoking and drinking beyond.

"Can you name me a house in which I'm likely to obtain a bed for the night?" said York.

"No," said the purple-faced man, continuing to draw ale into thick glass, one-legged tumblers, which, as fast as he filled them, he pushed to a couple of fellows, who carried them, to the tables. "It'll be odd if ye gets a bed to lie in to-night, mate, in Deal. Why, it'll be ending in the boatmen having to turn their boats' keel up for lodgings;" at which observation a large heavy man, in a round hat and a great belt round his waist, fit for the snugging of a horse-pistol or two, burst into a loud laugh.

York walked out, and entered another tavern hard by. This, too, was full, its five bedrooms crammed, the state bed of the place to be occupied by no fewer than four men, to lie heel to heel whenever it should suit them to withdraw to it; as the perspiring, dried-up little landlord informed York with a grin of exquisite satisfaction.

He tried a third, a fourth; tramped out to the Cat o' Nine Tails alehouse; but to no purpose. Had every house had its forty beds to let, they would not have apparently met the demand that night for accommodation from the captains, mates, passengers, sailors who had come ashore on special business, or who had deserted, or who had to take the coach next day to London or wherever they might live, counting as passengers, upon days and perhaps weeks of detention if they stuck to the craft lying out in the Downs yonder.

York had now reached the Sandown extremity of Deal; he retraced his steps, and passing the houses he had visited, he arrived at much such another one as they called the Lonely Star, into which he walked. At the end of a tolerably long narrow passage was an open door, out of which floated clouds of tobacco-smoke along with the incense of the punch-bowl. A little on this side the door was a staircase, and nearer yet to the entrance a recess, in which sat a plump woman of fifty, with sloop-black eyes and red cheeks and tumbled chins. Over her head hung an old-fashioned lantern, the light of which was comfortably reflected in rows of bottles on shelves behind her filled with liquors of various dyes.

"Can I have a bed in this house?" asked York of this plump, good-humoured woman, who at his approach left all some knitting she was at work upon.

She ran her bright black eyes over him with an expression as though she found pleasure in the sight of his long womanly hair and handsome face and manliness of stature, and answered after a minute's thinking: "I'm afraid not, sir. Every bed in the house is taken. I never remember Deal so full of strangers."

"I shall have to return to the ship, then," he exclaimed. "Yet I would rather not. Plying betwixt the Downs and the shore is costly work to a poor man—at least your boatmen make it so. A spare sofa would serve me. I have been ill in South America, and am not yet well, and durst not lie in the open. A pillow and a roof for my head would suffice. I must be up by daybreak, perhaps before my sweetheart's mother, Mrs. Bax, lives my other side of Sandwich, more Minister than that town—D'ye know her name?"

"By name, sir, a very decent good lady, I'm sure."

"There's a bed for me there, but it's too far to reach it on foot to-night. Besides, my sweetheart, Jenny, will not expect me till to-morrow by noon, or thereabouts. Now, what am I to do for a bed? There will be other houses of entertainment in his town besides those I have visited in this street?"

"There's a gentleman," said the landlady, after a short spell of thought, "lying up-stairs who has used my house for some years running. 'Tis but a bit of a room he's in, sir, but he rests in a great big bed, broad enough

to house a large family. If you wouldn't mind sharing it with him, he'd accommodate you at my request. I don't doubt. What do you say?"

"You are very good, ma'am; 'twould be a godsend, I assure you. I could not feel more weary had I been tramping Deal all day."

"Step into the end room, then," said she, "and call for what you will whilst I find out if the gentleman will receive you."

He entered, and found himself in the company of some score and a half of seamen of all denominations, with a sprinkling of soldiers and a few women. The room was unpleasantly full; the height of it was no taller than a small ship's 'tween-decks, and it had something of the look of a 'tween-decks, with its substantial joists or rafters, its small porthole-like windows, and walls resembling bulkheads. A few of the nearer folks stared at him on his entrance, and a couple of the women giggled a bit at his hair; but the company were on the whole rather too drunk to give him much heed. It was an old-world scene that, for its utterly vanished qualities of colour, atmosphere, attire, is scarcely imaginable in these days; un-snuffed rushlights flaring on the tall, narrow chimney-piece and on the tables; men mahogany-cheeked with weather, some wearing their own hair in tails, some with wigs, with here a three-cornered hat cocked over its owner's nose, there a round tarpaulin perched on nine hairs, with a fathom of ribbon down the back; most of the people smoking long clay pipes, and arguing with drunken animation, with now and again the added hulla-balloo of one who would set up his throat for a song; the women in colors which made one think of a crockery shepherdess; and visions of copper-nosed salts looming out in postures of wrangling at the tables in smoke-obscured corners.

York took a chair near the door and called to the drawer for a glass of spirits. After a little the landlady came to him and said that she had knocked at Mr. Worksope's door and asked if he would object to a bedfellow; and that his answer was the gentleman was welcome if so be he would contrive to ride with an up-and-down cable; by which she understood Mr. Worksope to mean that he expected the gentleman to keep to his side of the bed. York thanked her, and said he should be glad to go to rest at once.

"I shall be quitting your house before you're up," said he, "and will pay you for the bed now, if you please."

"As you will, sir," said she; "it will be a shilling."

He gave her the money.

"There will be no difficulty," he exclaimed, "in letting myself out in the morning? I do not wish to disturb the house by a stiff wrestle with harsh bolts and difficult locks."

"That'll be your door, sir," said she, pointing to the street entrance at the end of the passage. "There is but one bolt, and it shoots easily. We fear nothing but the foreign invader at Deal, sir. The latch will fall when you pull the door after you."

He thanked her, took his bundle, and followed her upstairs. She knocked at a little door painted stone-color, leaning as with age in its frame. A voice answered, "Come in," in a muffled hurricane note.

"It's the gent, Mr. Worksope, as is to lie with you," responded the landlady; and then, putting the rushlight into York's hand, she bid him good-night with a pleasant wish that he would find his sweetheart happy and in gay health next morning.

The latch of the door appeared to be jammed; York struggled with it for some time, but could not succeed in lifting it. Meanwhile, he heard Mr. Worksope, who was manifestly a seafaring man, calling from the bed several varieties of sea blessings upon the eyes and limbs of his disturber, until, losing all patience, he bawled out in the tones of a gale of wind: "Put your shoulder to the latch and heave it up! Thunder and blood! ain't it plain that prising's your only tack?"

York did as he was told, and by so doing lifted the crazy old door off its latch, and entered.

He found himself in a little room, with the ceiling but a very few inches above his head. The apartment was almost entirely filled by a large, black, funereal, four-poster, undraped, and furnished with a perfect Atlantic Ocean of blanket, mattress and coverlet. On the left side of this immense bed lay a man, of whom nothing more was visible than a curious elongated face, as though his countenance had been stretched, lengthened the lineaments out of all proportion to their breadth. This odd face was crowned with a large red handkerchief, so twisted over the head as to serve as a night-cap. The clothes of a nautical man of that age lay heaped upon a chair under the very little window which gave light and ventilation to the room.

"Sorry to break in upon your rest, Mr. Worksope," exclaimed York, "but needs must, you know. But for your kindness, my bed to-night might have been on the cold ground, I fear—Deal's amazingly full, certainly."

"Very welcome, very welcome," growled Mr. Worksope in a somewhat softened voice, staring over the edge of the bedclothes with small, windy, deep-set eyes at the long hair and tall figure of the young fellow. There's room enough; only be so good as to bear a hand and tumble aboard, for I don't feel up to the knocker to-night, and there's been row enough going on downstairs since I've lain here to make a dead man get up and shoulder his coffin, for a cruise arter peace."

York fell to undressing as expeditiously as possible.

"What's your calling, may I ask?" inquired Mr. Worksope, rumbering out the question with his mouth half covered with the bedclothes.

"A sailor," was the answer.

"What ship, sir?"

"Well, I was second-mate of the Coelia, but sickened at Valparaiso of some pestilence there, and was left behind by the master. I was down six months with the malady, and nearly a dead man. Then the captain of the big Jane offered to carry me home on condition of my helping him in the navigation of the vessel—I mean, taking observations and keeping the reckoning and the like; for he had lost his chief-mate, and his second, who was the ship's carpenter, couldn't read or write. We brought up in the Downs this evening; and as my sweetheart lives within a few hours' walk of this place, I came ashore, meaning to start for her home at dawn to-morrow. Small chance of my disturbing you, Mr. Worksope; you'll find me cat-like, and won't know I'm gone till you turn to look."

"Right you are, sir; right you are," rumbled the other; "there's room enough here. Why, boil me alive, oh! but this must have been a royal bed of state in its day."

"I'll blow out this light," said York, "—but have you a tinder-box handy, Mr. Worksope? I'm without that convenience—without a good deal that should have been mine but for Valparaiso. It's well to be able to strike a light; one never knows what may happen."

"There's my jacket on that cheer," answered Mr. Worksope; "you'll find what you want in the left-hand pocket."

York felt, and found the things, placed them near the rushlight, extinguished it, and got into bed.

They lay talking for a while. Mr. Worksope, it seems, had been boat-swain of a West Indianman for three voyages. He had been paid off in London a week or two before; and having been born at Deal, had run down to spend a few days at the old spot and to take a short cruise about the district. He was too sleepy to talk much; but it was plain, from the little he let fall, that he was a man who had used the ocean for many years, and had much that was moving and interesting to tell, whenever he should feel disposed to deliver himself of his experiences. Presently he began to wander, then to snore. York lay awake for some time, listening to the hum and roll of the voices of the drinkers in the room below. There was an oil lamp just outside the window, which threw a dim illumination sufficiently clear to render faintly visible the outlines of objects. The young fellow rested, lost in thought, with his mind going to his sweetheart from whom he had been parted fourteen months; then to his prospects in life; the offer made him by the captain of the Jane, his chances of getting the money due to him from the owners of the Coelia, and the like; and then the noises below quieting with the departure one by one of the revellers, he closed his eyes and was presently asleep.

He was awakened by a sense of suffocation, and found himself bathed in perspiration and panting for breath under the weight of the bedclothes. The boatswain was snoring heavily. All was silent out of doors, saving at intervals the moan of a gentle gust through the stealthy seething sound of the midnight waters pouring upon the shingle. He sat upright for the relief of the posture; but whether it was that the Valparaiso fever was not yet out of him, or that his condition rendered him particularly sensitive to atmospheric conditions, he found the temperature of the room insupportable. Indeed, the little compartment was nearly all bedstead. The lungs of the boatswain, to judge by his breathing, seemed to require the air of the open ocean to fill them. There was an odour of flue, too, along with a tepid flavour of bedclothes, that was as stifling in its way as the atmosphere of a bakehouse.

The young fellow quietly got out of bed with the design of opening the window, but found the casement, as the door had been, a sort of fixture, whose dislocation must result in the waking of the whole house. He pined for a drink of water; but there was no jug or washing apparatus in the room, and it was manifest that gentlemen who put up at the Lonely Star were to expect no better convenience than at the Lonely Star were sure to have a pump of its own as well as a backyard; coupled with a short spell of breathlessness in the feverish young marauder to explore for the relief his fancy figured of the house, and staircase and the public room he had entered. He could recall that, whilst seated in that room, he had taken notice of a glass door screened with white this step between it and the backyard, where, though he should not meet with a pump, he was certain to obtain fresh air.

He partially clothed himself; but, in trying the door, found he could not lift the latch with his fingers. He felt thing to enable him to prise open the jammed and rusty arrangement. The boatswain snored heavily in the soundest sleep. York, dreading the fellow-walked softly to the man's clothes, and, by the feeble light that shone up-pockets for any contrivance that should serve him as a lever. The jacket pocket contained nothing but a tobacco-case, a pipe, and some papers. He felt in the left-hand breeches pocket, and the weight of which proved them to be gold, apparently guineas and half-guineas. In the other pocket was a large clasp-knife such as sailors carry, with a ring through the end of the haft

for a laniard.

York took his knife, went to the door, and succeeded in lifting the latch; and this time, he stole forth, leaving the door ajar; then putting the knife in his pocket, he groped his way downstairs all very quietly, as he did not wish to disturb the house. The street lamp that had helped him in the bedroom served him below wherever there was a seaward-facing window, and he made his way without difficulty through the long, low-ceiled public room, reeking and sickening with the lingering fumes of tobacco and rum punch; and pulling back the single bolt of the glass door he had taken notice of, he found himself in a little back-yard with, sure enough, the outline of a pump in the corner faintly touched by the starlight.

He drank and bathed his hands and face, and felt himself greatly refreshed. There was an inverted tub close to the pump, upon which he rested himself, and here he continued to linger for some time, reluctant to quit the sweetness and freshness of the cool air that was breathing direct from the sea for the oven-like oppressiveness of the little bedroom. Maybe he dozed, for he was suddenly startled by the near drowsy voice of a watchman calling the hour, two o'clock. On hearing this, he arose, re-entered the house, quietly bolted the glass door after him and returned to his bedroom.

(To Be Continued.)

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