

II. REDBURN'S DEPARTURE FROM HOME

It was with a heavy heart and full eyes, that my poor mother parted with me; perhaps she thought me an erring and a willful boy, and perhaps I was; but if I was, it had been a hardhearted world, and hard times that had made me so. I had learned to think much and bitterly before my time; all my young mounting dreams of glory had left me; and at that early age, I was as unambitious as a man of sixty.

Yes, I will go to sea; cut my kind uncles and aunts, and sympathizing patrons, and leave no heavy hearts but those in my own home, and take none along but the one which aches in my bosom. Cold, bitter cold as December, and bleak as its blasts, seemed the world then to me; there is no misanthrope like a boy disappointed; and such was I, with the warmth of me flogged out by adversity. But these thoughts are bitter enough even now, for they have not yet gone quite away; and they must be uncongenial enough to the reader; so no more of that, and let me go on with my story.

"Yes, I will write you, dear mother, as soon as I can," murmured I, as she charged me for the hundredth time, not fail to inform her of my safe arrival in New York.

"And now Mary, Martha, and Jane, kiss me all round, dear sisters, and then I am off. I'll be back in four months--it will be autumn then, and

we'll go into the woods after nuts, an I'll tell you all about Europe.

Good-by! good-by!"

So I broke loose from their arms, and not daring to look behind, ran away as fast as I could, till I got to the corner where my brother was waiting. He accompanied me part of the way to the place, where the steamboat was to leave for New York; instilling into me much sage advice above his age, for he was but eight years my senior, and warning me again and again to take care of myself; and I solemnly promised I would; for what cast-away will not promise to take of care himself, when he sees that unless he himself does, no one else will.

We walked on in silence till I saw that his strength was giving out,--he was in ill health then,--and with a mute grasp of the hand, and a loud thump at the heart, we parted.

It was early on a raw, cold, damp morning toward the end of spring, and the world was before me; stretching away a long muddy road, lined with comfortable houses, whose inmates were taking their sunrise naps, heedless of the wayfarer passing. The cold drops of drizzle trickled down my leather cap, and mingled with a few hot tears on my cheeks.

I had the whole road to myself, for no one was yet stirring, and I walked on, with a slouching, dogged gait. The gray shooting-jacket was on my back, and from the end of my brother's rifle hung a small bundle of my clothes. My fingers worked moodily at the stock and trigger, and I

thought that this indeed was the way to begin life, with a gun in your hand!

Talk not of the bitterness of middle-age and after life; a boy can feel all that, and much more, when upon his young soul the mildew has fallen; and the fruit, which with others is only blasted after ripeness, with him is nipped in the first blossom and bud. And never again can such blights be made good; they strike in too deep, and leave such a scar that the air of Paradise might not erase it. And it is a hard and cruel thing thus in early youth to taste beforehand the pangs which should be reserved for the stout time of manhood, when the gristle has become bone, and we stand up and fight out our lives, as a thing tried before and foreseen; for then we are veterans used to sieges and battles, and not green recruits, recoiling at the first shock of the encounter.

At last gaining the boat we pushed off, and away we steamed down the Hudson. There were few passengers on board, the day was so unpleasant; and they were mostly congregated in the after cabin round the stoves. After breakfast, some of them went to reading; others took a nap on the settees; and others sat in silent circles, speculating, no doubt, as to who each other might be.

They were certainly a cheerless set, and to me they all looked stony-eyed and heartless. I could not help it, I almost hated them; and to avoid them, went on deck, but a storm of sleet drove me below. At last I bethought me, that I had not procured a ticket, and going to the

captain's office to pay my passage and get one, was horror-struck to find, that the price of passage had been suddenly raised that day, owing to the other boats not running; so that I had not enough money to pay for my fare. I had supposed it would be but a dollar, and only a dollar did I have, whereas it was two. What was to be done? The boat was off, and there was no backing out; so I determined to say nothing to any body, and grimly wait until called upon for my fare.

The long weary day wore on till afternoon; one incessant storm raged on deck; but after dinner the few passengers, waked up with their roast-beef and mutton, became a little more sociable. Not with me, for the scent and savor of poverty was upon me, and they all cast toward me their evil eyes and cold suspicious glances, as I sat apart, though among them. I felt that desperation and recklessness of poverty which only a pauper knows. There was a mighty patch upon one leg of my trowsers, neatly sewed on, for it had been executed by my mother, but still very obvious and incontrovertible to the eye. This patch I had hitherto studiously endeavored to hide with the ample skirts of my shooting-jacket; but now I stretched out my leg boldly, and thrust the patch under their noses, and looked at them so, that they soon looked away, boy though I was. Perhaps the gun that I clenched frightened them into respect; or there might have been something ugly in my eye; or my teeth were white, and my jaws were set. For several hours, I sat gazing at a jovial party seated round a mahogany table, with some crackers and cheese, and wine and cigars. Their faces were flushed with the good dinner they had eaten; and mine felt pale and wan with a long fast. If I

had presumed to offer to make one of their party; if I had told them of my circumstances, and solicited something to refresh me, I very well knew from the peculiar hollow ring of their laughter, they would have had the waiters put me out of the cabin, for a beggar, who had no business to be warming himself at their stove. And for that insult, though only a conceit, I sat and gazed at them, putting up no petitions for their prosperity. My whole soul was soured within me, and when at last the captain's clerk, a slender young man, dressed in the height of fashion, with a gold watch chain and broach, came round collecting the tickets, I buttoned up my coat to the throat, clutched my gun, put on my leather cap, and pulling it well down, stood up like a sentry before him. He held out his hand, deeming any remark superfluous, as his object in pausing before me must be obvious. But I stood motionless and silent, and in a moment he saw how it was with me. I ought to have spoken and told him the case, in plain, civil terms, and offered my dollar, and then waited the event. But I felt too wicked for that. He did not wait a great while, but spoke first himself; and in a gruff voice, very unlike his urbane accents when accosting the wine and cigar party, demanded my ticket. I replied that I had none. He then demanded the money; and upon my answering that I had not enough, in a loud angry voice that attracted all eyes, he ordered me out of the cabin into the storm. The devil in me then mounted up from my soul, and spread over my frame, till it tingled at my finger ends; and I muttered out my resolution to stay where I was, in such a manner, that the ticket man faltered back. "There's a dollar for you," I added, offering it.

"I want two," said he.

"Take that or nothing," I answered; "it is all I have."

I thought he would strike me. But, accepting the money, he contented himself with saying something about sportsmen going on shooting expeditions, without having money to pay their expenses; and hinted that such chaps might better lay aside their fowling-pieces, and assume the buck and saw. He then passed on, and left every eye fastened upon me.

I stood their gazing some time, but at last could stand it no more. I pushed my seat right up before the most insolent gazer, a short fat man, with a plethora of cravat round his neck, and fixing my gaze on his, gave him more gazes than he sent. This somewhat embarrassed him, and he looked round for some one to take hold of me; but no one coming, he pretended to be very busy counting the gilded wooden beams overhead. I then turned to the next gazer, and clicking my gun-lock, deliberately presented the piece at him.

Upon this, he overset his seat in his eagerness to get beyond my range, for I had him point blank, full in the left eye; and several persons starting to their feet, exclaimed that I must be crazy. So I was at that time; for otherwise I know not how to account for my demoniac feelings, of which I was afterward heartily ashamed, as I ought to have been, indeed; and much more than that.

I then turned on my heel, and shouldering my fowling-piece and bundle, marched on deck, and walked there through the dreary storm, till I was wet through, and the boat touched the wharf at New York.

Such is boyhood.