

*Book One*

*The Adventures of Jonathan Moore*

# *Warship Poseidon*

by  
Peter Greene

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The Adventures of Jonathan Moore: Warship Poseidon  
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Author's note: This book has been written so that it can be easily read aloud, with dialogue direction pertaining to who is speaking. This will make reading aloud more enjoyable for all parties. Also, chapters have suggested breaks approximately halfway through marked by a series of asterisks:

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This makes it easy to stop at a sensible point and then continue the story the next day.

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# 1

## *Life on Brick Street*

Twelve-year-old Jonathan Moore lived in a three-sided wooden box at the end of a dark and filthy alley. It was situated within a heap of broken boards, split barrels, and rotted wood crates. All he had to his name was the clothes on his back and a tattered old horse blanket he had earned one day by working odd jobs at a local stable. Usually dirty, smelly, and chilled to the bone, he never knew when he would have his next meal. Jonathan spent most of his days searching for food, repairing damages to his box, and trying to stay out of the inhospitable weather.

As Jonathan and all the other poor souls that had no home or money were well aware, living in London in the year 1800 was a dangerous existence. It seemed that most of the days and nights were subject to howling wind and ever-present rain. In the winter, the snow and icy temperatures were more than uncomfortable: the cold could even kill. Clean water, simple water, was difficult to come by. Many were forced to drink from contaminated sources and caught cholera. Jonathan had seen people die from the disease, and it frightened him very much. At night, there were rats almost everywhere, and other more dangerous animals on the streets: dark and scary men, some roaming the cobblestone in gangs, loud and boisterous, committing crimes of the most terrible sort. There was drinking, stealing, fighting, and sometimes ... even murder.

Living on the streets was hard enough for a grown man. Still, to Jonathan, a mere child, it was nearly impossible and always uncomfortable and wretched. Many boys did not survive.

Now, to children that lived in homes in the better parts of town, life was wonderful. Inside, kitchens buzzed with activities that produced scrumptious beef and chicken pies, and breads that filled the air with sweet aromas. There were sugar cookies and sometimes, even a cherry tart or two. Children played parlor games, ran races in the parks, and had stories read to them out of big, mysterious books. Birthdays and special occasions always meant there would be parties and presents. And each night, there were warm fireplaces and soft music that lulled little ones to sleep in their comfortable beds, surrounded by puffy pillows and soft blankets.

Quite differently, Jonathan Moore spent most of his days sitting silently in his miserable, gloomy box. He would often look down the length of his alleyway, out past the street into a second-floor window of a quaint old house. The outside was nothing special, it being like most of the homes he saw in the neighborhood. However, it was special on the inside. If he were lucky, Jonathan would sometimes see a father walking down a hallway, carrying a little boy. He would watch intently as the man would place the boy in a small highchair and lovingly feed him porridge and milk.

Watching this made Jonathan remember that at one time, he, too, had a father and a mother and a house to live in, with a fireplace and, yes, even his own bed in his own room. It had been warm and dry, and there was always something to eat. Most especially, he knew that his mother and father loved him because they told him so every night as they tucked him into bed. However, they were both gone now, and there was no one to care for him. He had become a street urchin, a boy like many others who lived in the gutters and the alleys, just trying to make it through another day.

It was not the cold, wet rain, or the alley's foul smell, or even the difficult life he led that dampened his spirits. It was the simple fact that Jonathan vaguely recalled better days as part of a family, and that memory made his current situation almost unbearable. He missed his mother and father greatly, and each day he wondered about all that had happened in the last few years. Sometimes, the sadness seemed to surround him, like a bitter, dark cloud, and it weighed heavily upon his heart.

Following another night spent shivering from the awful chill, Jonathan awoke cold and stiff, as he no longer fit entirely inside the box. He seemed to be healthy and growing like a weed despite his meager nourishment. By keeping his manners sharp, his words clear and precise, and his tone always gracious and respectful, Jonathan was often able to find some kind of work. And work meant a few shillings, and shillings meant a meal. Many times, he earned just a single meal a day, but that is all he seemed to need.

Sitting up, Jonathan looked outside of his box to notice that once again, the morning brought no relief from the night's cold. It had been raining most ferociously; only just letting up as the sun rose somewhere above the dark gray clouds that covered the city. Water still poured off the rooftops of the buildings that made up the alley. It seemed to Jonathan that most of the water fell upon his box and somehow found its way inside to drop on his woolen cap, soaking it thoroughly.

This will turn out to be another fine day! Jonathan said to himself. I will probably catch a cold by noon. But at least it's quiet, and no one will bother me. Even evil men stay inside when it rains.

Today he was to work for a chimney sweep, along with his best friend, Sean Flagon. The boys had met on the streets

of London and formed a fast friendship, being of similar age and disposition. Together, they would devise ways to work on the farms near the outskirts of town or in local businesses. No matter what the situation, Sean always had a cheery attitude, and the two boys made a successful go of it as a frequent team. After a short while, they became deep friends and cared for each other like the closest of brothers.

Once inside an old, dreary London pub, the boys had done a hard morning's work on the sizeable stone-stacked chimney. As Sean cleaned the flue, Jonathan's role was to collect the black soot in a canvas bag, careful to keep the dust from spreading.

"Are you finished yet, Sean?" Jonathan asked, looking up the flue.

"Almost!" came the reply, along with a stream of black soot rushing downward from somewhere high in the chimney, dousing Jonathan in a cloud of coal-colored dust.

"You had better watch it, Jonny Boy," said Sean from somewhere above. "I'll be sending the last of this black stuff your way."

"Thank you for the timely warning," Jonathan said as he coughed and tried wiping the dirt from his face as best as he could.

"Don't mention it," replied Sean as he continued working, sending ash downward.

Jonathan tried to sweep the dust into the bag and contain the spread of dirt. This pub on Ayliff Street was too dark and dirty to begin with, he thought. A little dust would not be noticed as there were only two other people in the house besides Sean and himself. However, there was considerably more than just a little dust in the bag.

The chimney sweep had agreed to use the boys as assistants, though did no work himself. He decided to take his payment early at the bar and was now resting comfortably, slumped over and snoring. Jonathan and Sean had reached an agreement with the pub owner directly to do the sweeping and cleanup for one sandwich each. A meal like that would be most welcome to both boys as neither had eaten more than crumbs and crust for several days. Being orphaned and homeless and living literally on the streets of London meant that the frequency of meals was anything but frequent.

"Done!" came the call from the flue, and shortly Sean Flagon appeared in the firebox, covered in blackness but smiling widely. He dusted himself off as best he could; however, that only caused the dark cloud of dust to grow and drift as Jonathan tried to contain the storm.

"I am as hungry as I can ever remember, Jonny Boy," said Sean.

"I am as well," agreed Jonathan. "I can't remember when we ate last, but I am sure it was less than filling. The sooner you help me tidy this up, the sooner we eat."

Sean smiled and immediately began scooping soot and debris from the fireplace with his cupped hands, adding to the collection in the bag.

"Are ya little urchins finished?" came a deep voice. It was the proprietor of the pub.

"Yes, sir," said Jonathan as the man approached them from behind the bar.

"Oh. Well then, I believe yer employer said ya were to be paid out of his share," the man said, "so he will take care of ya when he wakes, I'd gather."

Jonathan watched the shift in the man's eyes and knew immediately that he was attempting to cheat them. He had seen that expression before from unscrupulous employers when it came time to receive his pay.

Jonathan and Sean now looked suspiciously at the pub owner and tried to think a step ahead. They needed food desperately, as it had been a long stretch without. Waiting to discuss the matter of payment with the drunken chimney sweep would probably yield no fruit whatsoever.

"Begging your pardon, sir," said Jonathan graciously. "Though we were hired by the sweep, we made our agreement with you personally, as you must recall. A sandwich and a glass of milk each."

"Aye, it was," added Sean, now growing wary.

"That's not 'ow I remember it," said the man, growing angry. "Ya little brats best be off—and 'ope your friend 'ere doesn't drink yer share and forget to pay ya now!"

Jonathan saw that Sean. Appeared to be shocked and about to burst into anger or tears; it was hard to tell which. The afternoon's work was now wasted: no pay, no food—just a bag of ashes for their trouble. And that gave Jonathan an idea.

"You will not cheat us, sir," he said as he handed the bag to Sean.

"Why you lit'l—"

"—and it would be a shame if my associate here would have to run about this shop and empty the contents of his bag... all over your establishment, yes? I can tell you, sir, that he is a difficult one to catch."

Sean now smiled and opened the bag a peek, then tilted it slightly to one side. A thin stream of soot poured out, streaming down to the stone floor and creating a cloud of dust that was surprisingly large.

"Oops!" he said. "I spilled a wee bit! What a mess it made!"

The pub keeper relented.

Jonathan was quickly shown to the kitchen, where the cook made him the promised sandwiches—just cheese, but

enough of it—and produced two glasses of thin milk. Sean stayed in the pub, holding the bag of soot as insurance.

When Jonathan returned, they hastily drank the milk, a rarity to be sure. They then walked out the back door, carrying the brushes and poles used to clean the flue, along with the bag of soot. They sat down quietly on the stoop to enjoy their well-earned rewards.

“It’s still raining, but just a drizzle,” said Sean, looking up to the gray sky.

“I don’t think it ever stopped,” added Jonathan. “It’s a wonder we aren’t flooded out to sea.”

“Aye! Jonny! That reminds me! I heard that ships are due at the docks. Cargo ships coming—a lot of them!” said Sean.

“I love going to the docks,” said Jonathan between bites. “The ships are wonderful, aren’t they? And maybe we can find a little work as well!”

“I need to ask around and see when they are coming in,” said Sean, rising from the stoop with his sandwich in his hand. “I’ll let ya know. Hopefully, tomorrow, eh?”

“Thanks, Sean. Until tomorrow, then.”

With that, Sean disappeared around the corner, leaving Jonathan to his sandwich. He ate silently and hurriedly, thinking about the London docks and the beautiful ships that were always present. If they were lucky, they might see a few warships with handsome white sails and tall masts. Jonathan wondered what it would be like to live on one. It had to provide some sort of adventure to the men aboard. However, in his position as a poor, orphaned boy, this was only a dream. Chances were extremely slight that he could ever sail on a ship of any kind. His adventure would come from his quest for survival. And maybe it was true what Sean had said to him about the ships and the British Navy: “It’s no life for anybody. Working on a ship is like being a slave, and that is a terrible existence, toiling all day and all night with no food or sleep!”

I will never know, thought Jonathan, and he returned to his meager meal.

As he took another bite of his sandwich, he heard strange laughter from the alley beyond. It was not the kind of laughter made when people were enjoying themselves, but the sneering type as heard when bullies were about. Jonathan had heard it before. Unfortunately, he had often been on the losing end of bullying when he first landed on the streets. They would take clothes, food, and even the small trinkets he carried. After several years, though, he had become bolder and had recently put a few bullies in their places. It was never his intention to start a fight; however, if he was forced to be in one, he would leverage whatever advantage he could. Physically, Jonathan was of average height for his age—and average weight as well. This offered no benefit when dealing with older bullies. His mind was his greatest asset and coupled with his superior speed, the result was—surprise.

He put the remainder of his sandwich unceremoniously into the pocket of his thin jacket and then rose and peered around the corner. There, as he had feared, he saw Sean on the ground, surrounded by three older boys, appearing to be a few years older than Jonathan. He had seen this particular group roaming the streets the past week. It was known that they were recent additions to the area—homeless for sure, and still a bit new to the game, as he and Sean called it.

“I said give me the sandwich, ya pig!” said a dark-haired boy as he loomed over Sean.

“You can take a hot poker and lick it, ya scab!” retorted Sean, more angry than afraid.

The dark-haired boy delivered a hard kick aimed at Sean’s side. Instinctively, Sean blocked the blow with his arm, but searing pain raced from his elbow to his shoulder. As bad as it felt, Sean knew it could have been worse.

“We can split that sandwich three ways!” said a blond boy.

“That’s not much!” said the third boy as he tried to kick Sean but clumsily missed.

“Give it to me!” said the dark one, delivering another kick that found its mark.

Jonathan crept forward slowly—but not until he’d taken one of the brush poles they had just used to clean the pub’s chimney. It was made of strong, hard wood and about three feet long. He had seen a few street performers use poles and the like to act out sword fights and balancing feats. He’d even worked with them, playing roles, and received a few quick lessons on their use as swords. He was a fast learner. One rule was to never use the stick as a bat, he remembered. Never swing until the game was over.

“This is ya last warnin’, ya Irish cuss! Hand it over!” said the dark boy once again.

Sean did not answer but moved backward on the wet ground. His escape was soon blocked by the other two bullies, who continued laughing and spitting at their prey.

“Now yer gonna get a lickin’!” said the dark one. He moved in closer to Sean. As he raised his fist to strike the boy, he felt a sharp poke on the back of his head that almost made him topple over.

“Aay!” he cried, turning.

There was Jonathan, standing with his right hand holding the pole like a sword, aimed straight at the bully’s face. Without a word or hesitation, Jonathan thrust the stick forward with great speed and, more importantly, accuracy. The tip punched the dark-haired boy in the left eye, and he screamed out in pain. Jonathan advanced quickly, delivering a sharp kick to the side of the boy’s knee. The cracking sound was sickening. The dark-haired boy went down.

“What’s this?” said the blond bully as he turned from Sean and moved toward Jonathan. “Are ya a knight with yer sword and yer—”

Jonathan reacted swiftly. He lunged directly at the boy’s lower midsection, arm extended first and right foot moving forward. The pole struck painfully in the boy’s crotch, dropping him straight to the hard cobblestone. Spinning, Jonathan turned back to the dark-haired bully who was beginning to rise. Jonathan delivered a sweeping blow on the side of the enemy’s neck. Down he went, again.

“Are you hurt, Sean?” asked Jonathan as he eyed the third boy.

“Not really. I was just about to teach ‘em a lesson when you came along.”

“What about this last one, Sean?” Jonathan asked.

Rising with a little help from his friend, Sean faced the clumsy bully and smiled.

“Aw, he’s no trouble,” Sean said.

“I don’t want no trouble!” said the remaining bully, obviously afraid.

“Boo!” shouted Sean, laughing as he started at the last standing ruffian.

The boy ran as fast as he could out into the street, never looking back.

“I’ll get ya for this!” said the dark-haired boy. His voice was pinched and weak, and he rolled in pain on the rain-soaked ground.

Jonathan quickly rushed to his side and bent over the boy’s strained face. He looked him in the eye.

“You were stealing from us. That will not stand. I wish you no further harm. However, I warn you. If you ever bother my friend again, you won’t need to come searching for me. I will find you. Do you understand?”

The bully regarded Jonathan for a moment. As he stared into Jonathan’s eyes, he realized that this young boy was no one to be trifled with. Resigned to defeat, he simply looked down and nodded.

“Good,” said Jonathan. “It would be best if you were to find another neighborhood. Welcome to London.”

Jonathan and Sean walked away, dusting themselves off, but to no avail. The soot from the chimney and the scuffle in the alley had left them dirty and a bit shook. The addition of rain was turning the dirt that covered them into an oozing black paste. Though the water aided in cleaning their faces slightly, their clothing was utterly ruined.

“But at least our stomachs are full, right?” asked Sean.

“Another day in the great city of London!” chuckled Jonathan. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Heading back to his home, as it were, Jonathan blended in with the thin crowd on Brick Street, eyes on the ground, searching for dropped coins or food as was his habit.

After walking a few lonely and fruitless wet blocks, Jonathan turned down his alley, at the end of which was his three-sided wooden box. There was a tarp hidden within the pile of debris; he would not leave it out in the open, knowing it would be stolen. Its precious quality of being somewhat waterproof was his only defense against the harsher elements of rain, sleet, and snow. He retrieved the tarp and draped it over his box as the rain now picked up, turning from a drizzle to a mild downpour.

As tales often tell, events do happen that alter lives, and so it would be for Jonathan Moore. His state of affairs changed dramatically the very next morning.

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Jonathan had been sleeping uncomfortably, tossing within the wooden box. The rain had lessened to a mere drizzle as morning approached, and since he was now unable to sleep, he decided to wake. It was still dark; the lanterns in the street beyond glowed dimly. As he rose, there came a commotion: running feet—dozens of them—approaching his alley. There were voices of gruff men swearing and calling out. He could hear a few screams and cries from young boys, one most assuredly belonging to Sean Flagon.

Jonathan peeked out from his box in time to see Sean stop at the entrance of his alley. He looked at Jonathan, fear on his face, and yelled, “Run, Jonathan Moore! They are after us all! Run!”

“Who is after us?” Jonathan called. But Sean was already gone.

Jonathan cautiously crawled out of his box and stood up, shaking with dread. He peered down the alley and out into the street, not knowing what to expect. Within a moment, he saw a shadow against the wall growing larger and larger. Then a stocky, dark man appeared. He stared at Jonathan for a moment and growled loudly.

“I see another one in a-here!”

With that, the dark man began rushing toward him. Being prepared, Jonathan had practiced his escape route for just such a purpose. With a streak of panic to propel him, he ran to the back of the alley. Swiftly, he climbed the crates, broken barrels, and planks of wood he had stacked at the alley’s end. He scurried up, up, up, making his way to the top. From

there, he could go over the high brick wall that separated the alley from the open square of shops and carts on the other side. He would be safe in the market; there were many nooks in which to hide.

As he scrambled, he could hear footsteps coming fast from behind. He glanced over his shoulder to see that the large man was almost upon him. He clambered to the top of the pile as fast as he could. Suddenly, he felt the man's cold hands scratching and grasping at his ankles and feet. He spun around to see the stubble-faced brute. The man had shadowy eyes and a scar on his face. He wore a dark jacket and a funny cap with something written on it in gold, though Jonathan could not make out the words. The man leered and snarled as he tried to better his grip on Jonathan.

"Arr! Ya scruffy bilge-rat! Hold a-still! Don't-a you know what's a-good for you?"

Jonathan answered with a kick to the man's large and pimply nose, knocking his attacker backward. The man was shocked at the blow's power and teetered back and forth for a moment on the pile of boxes and wood. He tried to grab hold of something to stop from falling, but the boy sent another kick to the man's chest, finally knocking him down off the crates, to crash right through Jonathan's box with a loud bang.

"Ow!" the man cried. "I think I broke-a me buttocks!"

Jonathan did not wait to see if that was true. He quickly swung his legs over the last crate at the top of the heap and pulled himself up onto the wall. The rain had left the bricks slippery and wet, and that caused him to lose his footing. He clumsily went over the brick wall into the market square on the other side, yelling as he fell. His legs hit something soft and squishy.

Expecting to see a pile of rags or a few sacks of flour, Jonathan heard a voice.

"Ooof! Get off of me, ya little gutter pig!"

He had fallen on a fat, drunken man sleeping in the street.

"Pardon me, sir, I meant no harm!" Jonathan said as he rolled away from the man and quickly ran into the square. Hiding behind carts and crates, he made his way along to the center of the market, then stood up to carefully look about. Though the morning light had not yet lit the scene, he could tell that no one was in the market at this early hour. He sighed in relief, trying to calm his shaking nerves. Once he had caught his breath, he adjusted his wool cap and began thinking of what to do next.

Suddenly, a voice called out from behind.

"There he is, lads! Faster! Faster! He's the last one for this evening!"

There were now several men rushing after him. Each appeared mean and dirty. And like the man from the alley, each was clothed in a silly cap and dark jacket. Jonathan now realized who, or really, what they were: a press-gang, a group ordered to capture men and boys to be sent out on England's sailing ships to help fight the war or, possibly, to work in the yards that supplied the ships.

Jonathan sped through the square, around the empty carts, and behind piles of boxes and crates. All the time, the men seemed to be getting closer and closer. He ran from the market and down a side street, looking over his shoulder as the men pointed and called out. Could he escape? He was so tired of running and so weak from hunger. The cheese sandwich from the day before was not enough to sustain his effort.

He knew he must continue running, and he did, gasping for every breath. Then, his chance: a dark alleyway just ahead. Jonathan turned sharply into its shadows and ducked behind a large stack of barrels. If he could not outrun them, he could outthink them and hide. Trying to slow his breathing, he crouched behind the barrels, holding as still as possible. Peeking out after a moment, he saw the men run past. They had not seen him.

Jonathan waited a few minutes for good measure to make sure the men were far, far away. He then stood up, brushed himself off, and fixed his cap upon his head. He decided to walk back to the alley where his broken, cold box awaited him. But as he stepped out from behind the barrels, a tall, thin-faced man suddenly appeared, blocking his way.

"Oh! Who are you?" Jonathan cried out in surprise.

This man was much like the others who chased him, and he too wore a cap with something written upon it. His beard was a bit shorter than that of the man Jonathan had kicked off the crates. He was thinner, and for the most part, free of large scars, and somewhat less pimply. As he approached, Jonathan could see he wore a thick, black, wool coat with large black buttons. In the dim light, Jonathan could finally read what was embroidered upon the cap in gold letters: HMS *Poseidon*.

"The question is, my son, who are you?" asked the thin man. With incredible speed, he grabbed Jonathan and held him at arm's length with steely hands. He looked deep into the boy's eyes and inspected his face from all angles, noting the color of his hair and eyes.

Finally, he asked, "What's yer name?"

"I'm not telling you my name for anything," Jonathan said, trying to sound brave and strong. The thin-faced man only laughed, showing his big smile, which was missing a few teeth.

"Oh, really?" the man replied. As quick as a flash, he spun Jonathan about, pinned his arms in a tight grasp, and swiftly tied a small rope around Jonathan's wrists.

“Ouch! Let me go!” Jonathan cried, struggling to break free. He tried to kick the man, but it was no use. He would not budge or let him loose.

The man leaned into Jonathan’s ear and said, “How about a little game, lad? Simple enough, yes? I will try to guess yer name, and all ya ‘ave to do is tell me if I am right or wrong! Then I will decide if ya go free or ya come with me! Aye, it rhymes, right?” He laughed with a scratchy-wheezy cackle that Jonathan found very scary.

“I don’t want to play your game! And you could never guess my name,” said Jonathan. “And that rhymes, too!”

“Aye, it does—and well done!” said the thin man, surprised.

“No one knows who I am, except my parents,” said Jonathan, “and they are gone!”

Then the man smiled and said the most fantastic thing. “Ah! Then yer name might be... Jonathan Moore.”

Jonathan was stunned into silence. How could this peculiar, skinny man know his name?

The thin man was now grinning. His mouth appeared as wide as the moon in the sky, and he started to laugh once again.

“Now I know I’m right! The look on yer face tells it all! Ya are Jonathan Moore, and I have found ya! The cap’n will be so pleased—pleased as punch! There will be anchovies fer dinner tonight, I can tell ya!”

“Let me go!” protested Jonathan.

“I am correct, am I not? Ya are Jonathan Moore?”

“Yes!” said Jonathan, “how did you know my name? And who is the captain?”

The thin-faced man turned Jonathan around and firmly but gently led him out of the alley. Still holding him, he pointed down the street.

“The cap’n will need to see ya, that’s all I can say. Nonetheless, not to worry. No ‘arm will come to ya. That’s me word.”

The man led Jonathan along the lane, away from the center of the city.

This man knows my name, Jonathan thought. He had obviously been searching for me, but why? And who is the captain? What is an anchovy?

All these thoughts and feelings made him think about dinner for a moment, and Jonathan remembered that he was horribly hungry. Maybe he could have an anchovy for dinner as well if there were any available. Perhaps they were tasty, and eating one might almost be worth all this mystery and suspense.

They continued down the street, the rain now stopping, and the cold of night subsiding. The quietness was interrupted from time to time by the waking sounds of the city.

Now and again, the thin man would chuckle and wheeze. Then he’d look at Jonathan and smile kindly.

“Now, sorry to ‘ave tied ya up, but ya see,” said the man, “it is only fer yer protection and delivery. Ya are precious cargo, don’t ya know? I cannot lose Jonathan Moore. That would be quite serious.”

Jonathan kept quiet, thinking as they walked on. After a few more moments, the man led him down a dark and dreary side street, and there Jonathan saw five or six men moving about two horse carts. One cart was a simple flatbed; the other had what looked like a cage upon it made of iron bars, the kind in which were kept dangerous animals such as tigers or lions. Though it was difficult to see clearly at first, eventually, as he drew nearer, Jonathan could see that there were things inside the cage, moving slowly about.

“Now, lad, I know ya are a man of yer word, right?” asked the thin-faced man.

“Yes,” said Jonathan. “It’s all I have.”

“True!” the thin man said with a laugh. “That is all I ‘ave much of the time as well! So, if I untie yer hands, ya will not run? Ya will do as yer told?”

“That depends on what you want me to do,” said Jonathan warily.

“Oh, a simple thing,” the thin man said. “Just get in the cage.”

As they approached, Jonathan strained his eyes to see what was in the cage. He expected to see wild boars or, even worse, bears. However, as he neared the enclosure, he saw Sean Flagon—along with two other people, grown men, from their appearance. All sat nervously yet quietly in the bottom of the cage.

“Sean!” he called out in surprise.

“Well, I’ll be!” said Sean softly. “Jonathan Moore! They have got you, too?”

At the mention of his name, a man tending the cart nearby turned and regarded Jonathan in astonishment.

“Now, now, me lads!” said the thin-faced man. “Just ya be back to work. Mum’s the word! Say not a thing. It’s all up to the cap’n now!”

“But, Steward!” said one of the men, “I heard ‘em say his name is Jona—”

“I said hush, Jones!” snapped the thin man, now known to all in the cart as Steward.

Steward’s men smiled and went back to their work of hooking horses to the carts, though, now and again, they would sneak a peek at the boy called Jonathan Moore. Steward removed the rope about Jonathan’s wrists, opened the door on the back of the cage, lifted the boy up, and placed him inside.

“In ya go,” Steward said to Jonathan politely. “Off to Chat’am with ya.”

## 2

### *Aboard His Majesty’s Ship Poseidon*

Two of Steward’s men now sat on top of the cage and prepared to drive the horses. The rest of the men climbed up on the other cart and, once situated, sat silently staring at Jonathan. Soon, Steward called for them to leave, and the carts began rolling and rattling down the gloomy, gray streets. Jonathan took a place on the floor and looked at all the others in the cage. Besides Sean, there were two older men, both weary and hungry, dressed as if they too lived on the street. They did not seem scared at all, just tired. One man was even asleep.

“Sean, how did they catch you?” whispered Jonathan softly after a few moments. His friend just shook his head and began adjusting the straw at the bottom of the cage, trying to make the seating a bit more comfortable.

“Strange, it was, Jonny,” he whispered. “They cornered me between two coal carts! As I tried to run underneath, they grabbed me! Then, they asked me if my name was Jonathan Moore! I told them nothin’, except that they could go on and lick the hot end of a coal poker if they wanted me to give up anything.”

“Oh, Sean!” Jonathan said with a giggle.

“So they said to me that I just got a ticket to see the captain, whoever he might be,” said Sean, who now seemed to have positioned his straw just so. He slumped down and managed a smile. “Not to worry, Jonny. How bad could it turn out?”

“We are pressed, Sean!” said Jonathan nervously. “Though, honestly, can it be any worse than living in the gutter? We will see some sailing ships up close at the very least.”

As the carts continued rolling through the early morning chill, Jonathan observed each shop and house that lined the streets. People were leaving home for a long day’s work. Cooks and nannies were going to the market. Older boys were on their way to school. The great city is a busy place, he thought. Could a sailing ship be as exciting? What was there to do except enjoy the breezes and sights?

After an hour or so, the carts and their occupants left London proper, entering the lands east of the city, heading toward the sea. The morning never really brightened up completely; it faded into a gloomy cast for most of the afternoon. Clouds continued to drizzle, and at times hard rain fell on the countryside. When the rain ceased, a fog rolled in and out on the cold wind. Over hill and through small towns, they went for hours, huddled in the bit of straw that lined the cart’s bottom. Jonathan noticed that even though Sean could not possibly be comfortable, he had fallen asleep, curled up like a kitten. But Jonathan could not close his eyes. He was nervous yet also excited as he saw each town, and became interested in the goings-on and the sights he observed from within the cage.

Finally, as the afternoon wore on, Jonathan saw a sign on the side of the road: Chatham. He could see rows of houses and large buildings, with men scurrying about, moving carts laden with lumber, barrels, sacks, and crates.

As Steward’s carts rounded a corner and began a climb over a short rise, the sun finally peeked out from the clouds for the first time in what seemed to be a week. When they reached the top of the hill, Jonathan could see a great river and a bay beyond. The sun’s rays coming from behind were now shining brightly upon the buildings of the town and the many ships in the harbor. The water glittered with the sparkling light of the setting sun.

“Amazing,” was all Jonathan could say. “Chatham must be a seaport.”

As his cartmates slept and snored away, Jonathan could now clearly view the ships, and he wondered about all the excitement and adventure the men must have while at sea. He marveled at the enormous and beautiful warships moored there. To Jonathan, they were like colossal black stallions eager to race across the waves. However, they were held back by their masters for now, tied to the docks with chain and rope. Each was being loaded with supplies by hundreds of men carrying boxes and crates, moving all into the bellies of the great ships.

After a few moments, one of the men in the cart spoke.

“My name is Claise,” he said in a soft, even voice. He scratched his thin beard on his full face and stroked his thin hair. Jonathan thought him a young man, and he seemed neither excited, scared, nor nervous. He appeared to accept the entire affair.

“And I am Jonathan Moore,” Jonathan replied.

“It seems we are all in this together, Mister Moore,” said Claise.

“What is this?” asked Sean. Awake from his long nap, he yawned, rubbed his eyes, and scratched his blond head of hair. “Where are we going?”

“It would appear,” said Claise, “that we’ve been captured by a press-gang, and we are to be pressed into service.”

“But where are we going?” asked Sean again.

“Right ‘ere,” said Claise, as the cart suddenly stopped.



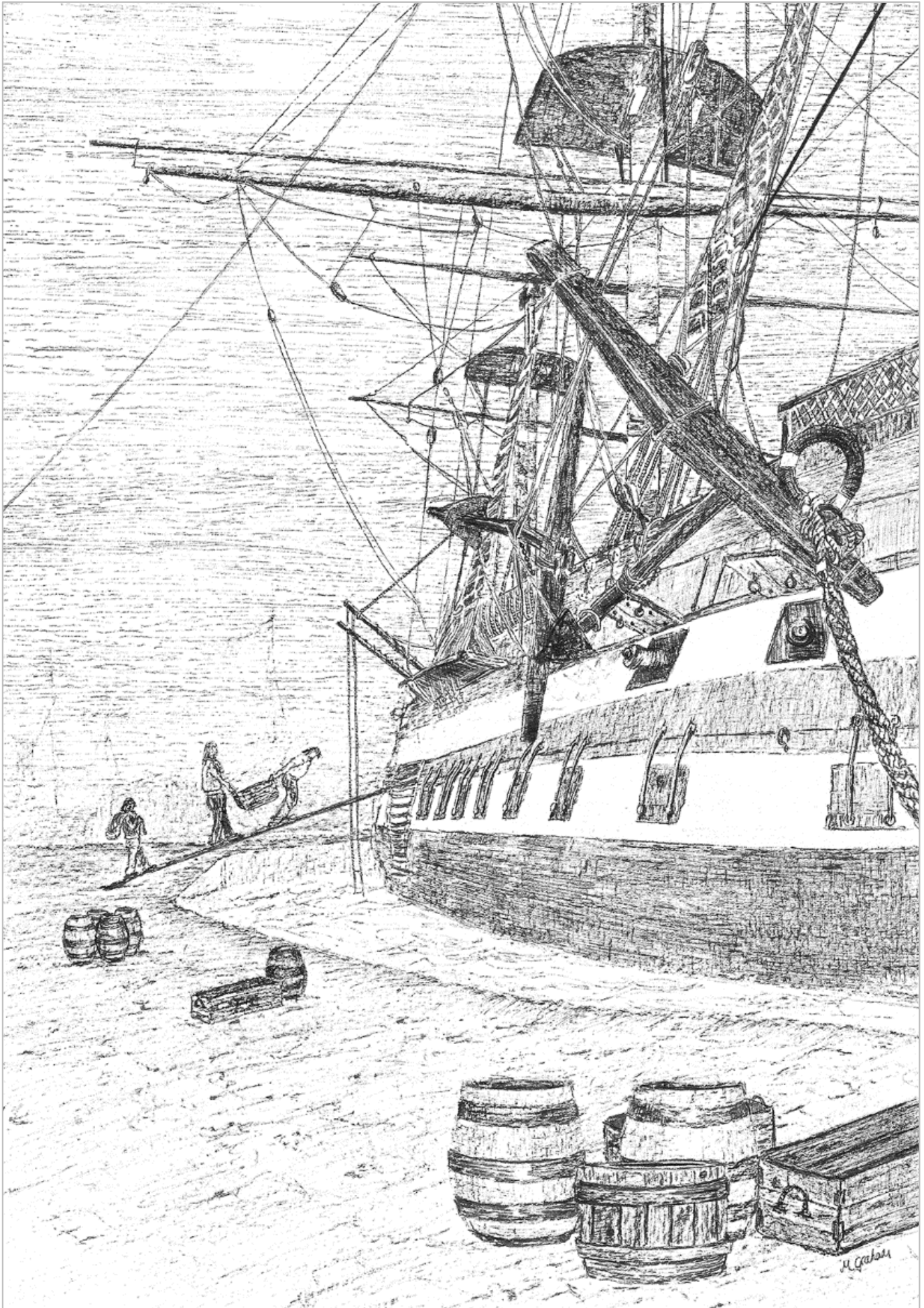
Through the hazy and golden mist cast by the setting sun, the boys could see they had arrived next to a long wooden pier overlooking the port. In front of them was a large ship, dark and mysterious. Jonathan was both frightened and astonished as he stared at the huge warship, black and foreboding. Like a floating fort it seemed, with men crawling all over, moving crates, loading bags. They yelled in a strange language that sounded like English but was just different enough that Jonathan could not quite understand anything that was being said.

“I would assume this is our new home,” Claise said with a laugh. “We are to be in the service of His Majesty, the king, and sail upon the seas to the glory of England!”

“Are we to be sailors?” asked Jonathan hopefully.

Steward appeared quickly after the cart had stopped, opened the door, and helped the boys out.

“Not yet, young sirs. Many tests and trials do ya need to pass to become a sailor. Though yer friend is right! Yer new ‘ome is a proud frigate of His Majesty’s Navy, a fightin’ ship, a fifth rate as we say, because of her forty-four guns. Not the biggest ship afloat, but one of the fastest—and she packs a wallop. Welcome aboard His Majesty’s warship *Poseidon!*”



*HMS Poseidon*

Jonathan and Sean gazed in wonder at the size of the *Poseidon*. They had never seen anything quite as big or grand and, at the same time, anything so intimidating. The wooden ship stood dark and tall in the water above the pier, like a black, two-story mansion. However, this mansion had three tall masts like giant trees growing from the flat roof, and each mast had webs of ropes and netting all about. Jonathan noticed a small boat attached to the ship's side, high and out of the water, though it was only small when compared to the *Poseidon*. A sturdy railing ran along the entire edge of the great ship as if it were meant to keep the sailors from falling off. Beneath the rail, also running along the ship's length, was a painted gold stripe. The boys were stunned as they watched the gigantic anchor being hauled to the side of the vessel. It seemed as large as a house and twice as heavy. Indeed, a ship as large and as fast as the *Poseidon* must need a magnificent anchor such as this to slow it down, they thought. It only makes sense.

However, the most interesting feature was what the boys could see peering out of the small, square, windowless doors facing them on the side of this magnificent house. Each door was open, and each revealed the glitter of a golden circle sparkling in the setting sun.

"Those must be the cannons!" said Jonathan. "Sean! Look in those little doors!"

"I see!" Sean said. "And there are more cannon on the roof by the railing! My, you must have to be very skilled to fire one of those!"

"Roof? Doors? Cannons? Oh, by the saints, we've got a lot to learn!" said Steward. "In the navy, the roof is called the deck, and those doors are called ports, and, most importantly, we call 'em guns, not cannons, as cannons are fer the cretins in the army and are pulled by horses! But ya may get to fire a gun or two after some formalities, like yer acquiring of ship's clothings, yer bunk assignments, and, of course, yer meeting with Cap'n Walker."

The newcomers continued to marvel at the industry surrounding the ship. They were curious to see a group of young boys, roughly Jonathan's age, being led off the *Poseidon*. Their dress marked them as street people, homeless to be sure.

"Isn't that little John Hayden? From the alley by the baker?" asked Sean, pointing to one of the departing boys.

"At Dray Walk. Yes," answered Jonathan.

In a line, the boys were escorted past the cage. With eyes down, they slowly moved along, disappearing into the town.

"Where are they going?" asked Jonathan.

"They're not what we are lookin' fer," answered Steward.

"Why not? What's wrong with them?" added Sean.

Just then, one of the men from the cage started to run. Not toward the ship, which for some reason, is what Jonathan wanted to do; this man was running away. The boys and Claise watched as a group of sailors with tasseled hats started after him.

"Grab the landlubber, men! Bring him back in one piece! Hurry now!" yelled Steward.

"Where is he going? Isn't he supposed to go on the boat?" asked Jonathan.

"The boat?" shrieked Steward. He cuffed Jonathan on the back of the head—not too hard, but enough to make his head tingle. "We don't call one of His Majesty's war vessels a boat! What are ya? Daft? We call 'em ships! Can ya remember that?"

"Yes, yes," murmured Jonathan, now slightly embarrassed.

Steward cuffed him again on the back of the head.

"Never say 'yes'! To me and the common sailors, it's 'aye.' To a man in uniform, you always say 'yes, sir' or 'yes, Cap'n,' do ya understand?"

"Yes, sir," Jonathan said.

"Ahh!" Steward cried once again as he cuffed Jonathan a third time and gave one to Sean for good measure. "Don't call me 'sir.' To me or any of your betters not in uniform, ya call us by our name. For example, ya call me 'Steward' or 'mate.' Got that?"

Jonathan realized that this was his first lesson in the strange language of sailing ships. They were never called "boats"; they were called "ships." One was to say "yes, sir" to a man in uniform; otherwise, it was "aye."

But wait, Jonathan thought. Steward was wearing a black coat and a tasseled hat with "HMS *Poseidon*" stitched on the brim. Wasn't that a uniform? Before he could ask, the press-gang returned with the man who had run away. He was struggling to free himself again, but the men held him fast.

"And where did ya think ya were goin' there, hmm? Had an important date, did ya?" asked Steward. The man just grunted and groaned, trying to break free.

Claise spoke up. "I know him. His name is Robinson. He got a wife and kids. Probably wants to go 'ome to 'em."

"Don't we all?" asked Steward. "Many a needed father 'as been pressed into service of the British Navy. His fate will be up to Cap'n Walker to decide. Certainly running away will not incline 'em to take your side, Robinson. Bring him aboard," he said to the sailors. "But toss him in the brig for safekeeping until he is to see the cap'n!"

As Steward and the gang led the new men down the pier alongside the great ship, Jonathan could not keep his eyes

off the *Poseidon*. Everywhere he looked, something exciting and mysterious was happening. He saw a giant crate being hauled high onto the upperdeck of the ship with a series of ropes and squeaking wheels, all attached to a swinging pole. Men pulled on the rope as a team, while one barked orders at them to “heave” and “steady” the load. Another man pulled a rope that swung the great arm across the pier to hold the crate over the ship’s deck.

“That’s the yardarm,” chuckled Steward. “Lots of handy uses, boys. I ‘ope that ya never find out about all of ‘em.”

As they neared the center of the *Poseidon*, they saw a wooden bridge of sorts that connected the ship to the pier. It did not seem to be a very sturdy bridge; in fact, the bridge wobbled and bounced greatly as men walked upon it. Jonathan thought the men and supplies they carried might break right through the bridge’s wooden planks and fall into the water.

At the bottom of the bridge was a man holding a large book, and he watched everyone coming and going. Now and again, he would jot down something on a page or stop some of the men to have conversations.

“That is our purser, Mister Koonts, a warrant officer,” said Steward. “Sometimes we call ‘em ‘Counts’ because that is what he does. He counts everything that goes off the ship, and he also counts that what goes on. Men, clothes, boxes, water, shot, food, powder, muskets—”

“Excuse me, Steward, did you say...food?” asked Sean, swallowing so hard that even Steward looked at him as if there were a frog in the boy’s throat. Jonathan also heard the word ‘food’ and started to wonder what a ship’s food might taste like. He knew that Sean was probably just as hungry as he.

“Yes! Of course, food!” exclaimed Steward. “What did ya think? We didn’t eat? Some of the best food in the world is made, concocted, an’ served on the fighting ships of His Majesty’s Navy! Lord, what did you think we ate, the sea itself?” Steward shook his head in disbelief. “Some of the crew spends their pay on drink and trinkets, some on food for themselves and spices—”

“Pardon me,” interrupted Sean. “Did you say pay? As in we are paid?”

“We get paid?” exclaimed Jonathan.

“Of course, ya gowks!” said Steward. “It’s not a fortune, but it will do ya no harm!”

“If I could say so, Steward,” said Jonathan, “with a ship as grand as the *Poseidon*, and all these wonderful activities and men, and the great adventures and...and even food and pay, well, why would anyone not want to join the navy?”

“I see what you mean, Jonathan!” said Sean, also marveling at all that was going on around him. “I would never run away like Robinson, especially if I could have one of those fancy tasseled hats and a meal! This certainly would be better than living on the streets of London!”

“Oh, really?” asked Steward. “So are ya volunteerin’?”

Both boys turned toward each other and broke out into grand smiles.

“Aye, Steward!” they said together.

“Then that’ll be good for ya!” laughed Steward. “I will tell Cap’n Walker myself that ya are now volunteers and entitled to all the rights and privileges that go with it!”

Claise spoke up as he was standing right behind the boys. “Maybe I would like to volunteer, then. What rights and privileges does one obtain by volunteerin’?”

“Not a one!” said Steward, “but it makes the cap’n happy, and that is a good thing!”

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The new volunteers slowly and carefully followed Steward to the bridge, which he explained was called a gang-board. There stood Mister Koonts, the man with the giant book. He was heavyset and appeared older than the other men aboard, and was certainly concerned about his appearance. His clothing and face were considerably cleaner than anyone they had yet seen. He wore a dark-blue coat with a white vest and pants, and a black pointed hat. His glasses gave him an air of importance and intelligence. He looked up from his book and eyed Jonathan, Sean, and Claise intently.

“So, Steward,” he said, with a fast and high-pitched voice. “Who might these persons be? More street urchins pressed into the service of His Majesty’s Navy?”

“What is a street urchin?” whispered Sean. Jonathan only glanced back hard at his friend and shook his head for him to be quiet. Mister Koonts gave the impression of being quite stern, certainly a man not to be interrupted. Jonathan did not want to get on his wrong side.

“Yes, sir,” said Steward. “These are the fruits of last evenin’s labors, the last few to add to the dozen or so we brought ya yesterday. Excepting these ‘ere are a bit different! They’re volunteers!”

“Volunteers?” said Koonts, and then he laughed. “Good, good. Captain Walker will be pleased. Always likes volunteers!”

Steward nodded and laughed. “That is not the ‘alf of it, Mister Koonts. First, we’ ave here Edward Claise, twenty-nine years old, from London. Stand to the side, Claise,” said Steward.

Koonts made a note in his book and gave a simple nod to Claise.

“Next, we have one Sean Flagon, also of the great city of London, literally,” said Steward as he nudged Sean, saying, “Wait by Claise, my boy.”

As Koonts again nodded and scribbled something in his book, Sean moved forward, all smiles, looking about in wonder at all the goings-on of the *Poseidon*. “How exciting,” he said softly, “to be on such a magnificent boat! No! Not a boat—a ship!”

Koonts finished making notes in his book and turned his attention to Jonathan. “And who is this last volunteer, Steward?”

Steward smiled widely. “This, my dear Mister Koonts, is part of a matched pair, ya might say.”

“Meaning?” asked Koonts.

“They are together, this one and the last. Knew each other. Probably a good idea to keep ’em both?”

“I see,” said Koontz, though it was apparent he did not understand Steward’s logic or the lack of it.

“Particularly because this one ‘ere is a certain Mister...” Steward paused and waited for Koonts to look him in the eye. “An orphan, by all accounts—lost his father and mother, it seems. Livin’ on the streets, if you catch my meanin’. Goes by the name of...Jonathan Moore.”

“Oh my!” gasped Koonts, almost dropping his giant book. “J-J-Jonathan Moore? Really? Well...well!” Koonts looked deeply at Jonathan, now and again nodding and muttering to himself. “How old are you, my boy?”

“I am just twelve as of last February, sir,” answered Jonathan.

“And your father, when did you see him last?” Koonts asked.

“I really don’t remember, sir. I think it was when I was five or so.”

Koonts looked deeply at Jonathan and then scribbled something in his book. “And your mother, Mister Moore? Why isn’t she attending to you?”

Jonathan became silent for a moment as if trying to remember something sad and dark. Finally, after a few moments, he spoke.

“After my father went away, my mother and I left London to live with my auntie. My mother...she passed away from a cough and fever. M-my aunt and uncle...were rather cruel to me,” said Jonathan quietly. “So I ran away to find my father.”

“No doubt, no doubt, Mister Moore,” said Koonts as he laid a gentle hand on Jonathan’s shoulder. He scanned the boy’s watering eyes for a moment. “Sometimes life deals us grievous woes. Yes, it does. But we make the best of it, don’t we, Jonathan?”

“Yes, sir,” Jonathan said softly. “I do try.”

Koonts glanced at Steward, who was silent and solemn, looking at Jonathan and nodding his approval. He seemed to wipe a tear from his eye, but Koonts could not be sure.

“One last question,” said Koonts. “Do you remember your father’s first name? It wouldn’t be Nate, would it?”

“Nathaniel, actually,” Jonathan said. “My father’s name was Nathaniel Moore.”

At the sound of that name, several men within earshot stopped all movement, turned to Jonathan, and stared. One man carrying a large box of salted pork up the gang-board said, “Nate Moore?” Then he stumbled and tripped, falling into three other men coming from behind. They fell off the plank into the water below. The first man tried to steady the box; however, it slipped out of his hands and fell into the sea. An angry “Ouch!” came from below as the crate struck one of the now-swimming men. There was a great commotion as sailors rushed to help the men out of the water.

“Steady, all of ya!” yelled Steward. “Toss a rope to ’em and haul quickly! Let’s just carry on! Ya know the cap’n’s orders!”

All assisted in the retrieval of the men until they were safely back to the dry pier. No real harm was done.

“Why are you so interested in my father’s name?” asked Jonathan.

But Steward just nudged him toward the gang-board, shushing him and patting him on the back.

“All matters for the cap’n, not for us,” said Steward. “C’mon Claise, Flagon. Up the gang! Many things to do! Much loadin’ to finish as we take on supplies fer our cruise. Eventually, before the night is through, ya need to see Cap’n Walker.”

Once they reached the top of the gang-board, the boys and Claise stood still in amazement. Before them was a large wooden deck, with planking stretched all the way from one end of the ship to the other, except for a sizable area in the center. That section was lower by ten feet or so, and in each corner, there were stairs that men used to access the raised decks in the front and rear.

Before them, men moved through all areas of the ship, calling out, running, lifting, carrying and organizing supplies. At first, there appeared to be no order to any of it, but soon it was clear that these men were experienced and careful in the execution of their duties. With few exceptions, they moved effortlessly from deck-to-deck, up and down ladders, in and out of hatchways that led below, and across expanses of planking as they moved barrels, hoisted crates, carried sacs and toted carts.

Steward had the newcomers stand out of harm's way toward the rear of the ship. In front of them directly was the tallest of the masts. In unison, the boys slowly looked up the entire height of it, staggering backward to take it all in.

"That thar's the *mainmast*," said Steward.

"It's tall," said Claise.

"An understatement," said Jonathan.

"From the mainmast to the stern, that means the rear of the ship, is the *quarterdeck*," said Steward.

"And I'd wager," said Sean, "that that far mast back there is called the back mast?"

"You'd be wrong," said Steward. "That's the *mizzenmast*. On the quarterdeck, ya can see the helm, or wheel as some say. And, of course, thar's twelve guns: six thirty-two pounders and six twenty-four pounders! That's a nice row of teeth I'd say!"

"What about this lower deck in the middle?" asked Jonathan pointing down through the wide-open space in the center of the ship.

"That's the *gundeck*," Steward explained. "It's where most of the guns are! Twenty-eight to be exact, all twenty-four pounders! A dangerous place when the fightin' starts! That's why we call it the *gundeck*, though, some call it the *upperdeck*."

"But it's below the quarterdeck," said Sean.

"Yes...but it's above the *lowerdeck*," said Steward, "which is right down through those hatches."

"Oh! I get it now," said Sean. "So, the lowerdeck is the name of the lowest of all the levels then?"

"No," said Steward. "The lowest level is the Orlop."

"The Orlop?" asked Jonathan. "The Orlop is the name for the lowest deck?"

"No!" said Steward, now getting angry. "The Orlop isn't a deck! It's the bottom of the ship, ya see?"

"My!" said Jonathan. "The names...it will be difficult."

"You'll learn it all," said Steward. "Now, see this passage alongside the rail next to us?" He pointed to a planked platform situated along the rail. It continued from their position all the way to the front of the *Poseidon*.

"It looks like a sidewalk, but made of wood," said Claise.

"Well, that's not a poor description," said Steward. "It's called a *gangway*. Thar's another one on the starboard side. That way, ya can move from the quarterdeck to the *fo'c'sle* without going down to the upperdeck and getting' in the way!"

"Pardon me, Steward," interrupted Jonathan. "The fo-cuss--"

"Excuse me," said Steward with a roll of his eyes. "The forecassle," he said, sounding out each letter of the word. "It's the same height as the quarterdeck, 'owever, it's fore, meaning to the front of the ship."

"Ah," said Jonathan, though not really understanding completely.

"You can see six more guns up there, right?" Asked Steward. "Four of 'em are nine-pounders, lit'le peeps I call 'em. But thar's two thirty-two pounders up there as well. "

"I sure hope I can fire one!" said Jonathan excitedly.

"Ah, me, too!" chimed Sean.

Claise, however, only shook his head. He did not seem as excited about the prospect of firing the gun and murmured something about the unfortunate position of being on the receiving end of such a weapon.

"She's a true barky," said Steward, with a huge smile as he looked about the ship. "Beautiful to us all! Not many built like her, only a handful. Technically, she's a fifth rate frigate. Sure, thar's larger ships, but they're slow and mostly sail in a straight line. Downright borin' if ya ask me! *Poseidon*'s like a fine racehorse, a thoroughbred, built for speed! She's and her sister, *Endymion*, are the fastest brigs in the ocean—logged over fourteen knots in trials as we was sailing large."

"Large?" asked Jonathan.

"That means with all her sails out and the wind at our backs," said Steward with a smile. "Ya don't know how lucky ya are, boys!"

Steward leaned over the gangway and directed a call to the center of the *gundeck*. "Jenkins! Jenkins! Come 'ere straightaway!"

After a moment, a man climbed the ladder in front of them. He had long white hair in a ponytail and a thin face with a gray beard. His deep blue eyes seemed to glow with friendliness at seeing the new crewmembers, and he smiled broadly. He made a motion as if tipping his hat, though he wasn't wearing a hat. Most shocking to Jonathan were the many tattoos on his neck and arms—and several earrings in each ear, mostly hoops of silver, and one of gold.

"Aye, Steward," he said.

"Boys, this is Patrick Jenkins, able seaman and a gun cap'n as well. He should be petty officer, but life twists us all—it's a long story. Best sailor on the ship, and as smart as any lieutenant, I can tell ya."

Jenkins looked down at the deck and smiled in embarrassment.

“Kind o’ ya, Steward. What can I do fer ya?”

“Jenkins, these ‘ere men are Moore, Flagon, and Claise,” said Steward. “New *Poseidons*, as it were. Get ‘em standard-issue blouse and trousers from the stores—and maybe a quick bath, as I am sure my nose isn’t the only one that can smell ‘em coming. Set ‘em up in the open lieutenant’s cabin, if ya please. Then, they are to see the Cap’n.”

“Aye, I will take ‘em,” Jenkins said, smiling. “Come on, lads. Let’s acquire your linen and such. I will show ya to yer new beds. Step lively.”

They followed Jenkins to the upperdeck, then down a hatch to the lowerdeck. There were hammocks strung everywhere, though few were being used at the time. They descended another hatchway, taking the ladder to the lowest level of the ship, the orlop. Jonathan marveled at all the strange stores and supplies he could see. Many small rooms and platforms were filled with lumber, barrels, sacks of flour, tools, and piles and piles of crates with strange markings upon them. At the end of one dark passageway, there was a locked wooden door. Jenkins produced a key from his pocket and opened the lock, reached inside and pulled out three blouses, three jackets, and three pairs of trousers. He held up the clothes next to each of the new crew members to size them with his eyes. After they received their garments, they were taught how to fold each piece neatly for stowage.

Jenkins led them back down the passageway to the center of the lowerdeck—“amidships,” as he called it. There, behind a screen made of a small sail, they found two large wooden barrels cut in half lengthways, creating two tubs. Steamy water inside each one was undoubtedly inviting, and best of all, there were bubbles.

“Well, look at that, Jonny Boy!” said Sean excitedly. “A tub with suds and all! I haven’t seen one of these since I was a young kitten!”

Jonathan thought how wonderful it would be to take a soak in one of these warm, bubbly tubs. He knew he was dirty, and he did not miss the words of Steward. He must be quite smelly and offensive to the men on board, and if he was to see Captain Walker tonight, shouldn’t he appear and smell his best? It only made sense.

So it was with great satisfaction that he received the news from Jenkins that, indeed, he and Sean were to take a ten-minute bath and that Claise would follow once they were done.

“Is that clear?” Jenkins said. “Ya do know ‘ow to take a bath at yer age, eh?”

“Aye!” they both said, slightly offended. In mere seconds, they were cozy-warm in the tubs, putting soap behind their ears, scrubbing feet, picking under fingernails, and even washing their hair. After a few minutes, they were clean and getting dressed. As they put on their new clothes, Jonathan and Sean waited for Claise to finish his bath. The boys giggled while he sang his strange songs and laughed, splashing his way to cleanliness. After what seemed like much longer than ten minutes, Claise emerged from the bath and dressed quickly.

Once they were presentable, Jenkins led the new crew members back along the orlop just the way they had come in, then up to the lowerdeck. They passed several thin doorways, all closed, until he stopped at a thin door with a lantern hung outside. The light cast shadows through the rafters of the passageway and the small room as Jenkins opened the door.

“Lucky ya are boys. Ya three are in the Third Lieutenant’s Cabin, seein’ as how we ain’t got one,” said Jenkins. Now, ya got Mister Koonts on one side ‘n Mister Watt on the other. Cap’n’s almost straight above ya, so I’d be quiet as church mice if I were you.”

“Yes, Jenkins,” they said.

“The rest of the men sleep in hammocks all the way to the bow, almost. But it’s too crowded and lively there for newcomers, especially young ones. Go on in. Home sweet home!”

Through the dim light, the boys and Claise saw that their room was about the size of a small closet. The ceiling was made of large beams, dark with age, and the smell of dampness in the timbers was mildly apparent. There were no windows anywhere, just walls and a ceiling made of wood. This struck Jonathan as quite humorous: another wooden box, he thought.

In the center of this tiny space were two hammocks, just webs of rope hung across the room, and three thin mattresses on a low table. Across from the hammocks were three cabinets.

“Go on in, men!” said Jenkins. “Each of ya pick a bed and a locker, meaning one of those cabinets on the upper wall there, and put ya things inside. Take a few moments to settle in, and then come topside and find me so I can take ya to Cap’n Walker. Don’t dally now.”

They each chose a bed. Claise, being the largest of the three, gratefully took a mattress and the low table. Sean took the lower hammock, and Jonathan the one right above. Flopping in his bed, Claise watched the boys struggle to slip into the hammocks, trying to get the padded bed into each one. They were swinging about like monkeys in a circus as they attempted to climb in. At one point, Jonathan seemed to settle into his netting. As he relaxed and stretched out, he fell right off—onto Sean.

“This is great entertainment!” laughed Claise, “Again! Do it again!”

Jonathan tried to climb back on, but he had much trouble with the hammock moving back and forth wildly. The only

way he could make do was to actually stand on Sean's head and hold on to a beam of the ceiling.

"We have a lot to learn, Jonny," said Sean, "even how to get in bed without killing ourselves!"

This made Claise laugh all the harder.

### 3

## *Captain Walker*

After becoming acquainted with their quarters and changing clothes, the boys and Claise climbed the ladders to the ship's waist to search for Jenkins. The sun was low in the sky, almost dancing on the waves. Jonathan could see graceful ships in the harbor moving silently with sails coming down and men scurrying about their decks. Though there were many larger ships nearby, to Jonathan, not a single one was as grand as the *Poseidon*.

There was a cool breeze coming off the water, and Jonathan took in a deep breath, smelling the fine salt air. He found it to his liking and smiled as he walked the ship with his friends in search of Jenkins. In the center of the waist, they found him sitting upon a barrel. Other men sat about upon nearby crates and stacks of supplies. They were tying ropes, braiding their hair, and mending clothes as they engaged in lively conversation.

"Well, if it isn't our newest brothers. Welcome aboard!" said Jenkins. "We are in our 'make and mend,' our time to, well, make and mend our personal belongin's. Sit! Join us! Ah, you look right and clean in your new clothes."

"They a-sure do," grumbled a man sitting with his face buried deep in his mending. As he looked up to stare at them, Jonathan gasped aloud as he saw the man's scruffy beard, pimply nose, and the large scar across his face. It was the man he'd seen in his alley that morning, the brute he had kicked in the face.

"Now, now, Gallotta," said Jenkins. "Let's not be ill-tempered to our new friends!"

"Ah, but-a you didn't have a kick-a to the face, eh? My naso, it still aches!" Gallotta growled.

All the men, save Jonathan and Sean, laughed out loud.

"Gallotta," said Jenkins over the laughter, "I would think anyone who saw yer face up close would 'ave the same reaction—to strike out in fear. Mister Moore was just protectin' himself, you see? He meant no 'arm, did ya, Mister Moore?"

As scared as he was, Jonathan stepped toward Gallotta and extended his hand in friendship. After a moment, he said, "Mister Gallotta, I most assuredly meant no harm to you. I was simply unaware of your mission. Please accept my sincere apology and my gratitude for bringing me to such a fine ship."

The surrounding men all looked up in surprise, and some even murmured, "Such nice manners," and, "A proper gen'l'man he is." All waited for Gallotta's reply.

The large Italian stood up and stared long and hard into Jonathan's eyes. Slowly but surely, his scowl turned into a grin. Then he took Jonathan's hand and shook it heartily.

"That's a-very nice. Glad to have-a you aboard, Mister Moore. No hard-a feelings, eh?"

"None, sir. Delighted to be your friend," said Jonathan, smiling.

The men sighed in relief as they realized that some possible unpleasantness had just been avoided. They patted Gallotta and Jonathan on their backs and welcomed Sean and Claise to the ship.

"Ah, that's the ticket!" said Jenkins. "Now we will all get along, right? And 'ow are ya getting' along in the cabin? Is it to ya liking?"

"Due to its size and level of discomfort, we named it 'the closet,'" Claise blurted out.

The men laughed.

"I assume, Mister Jenkins, that all the quarters are convenient," added Jonathan, not wanting to seem too particular. "Ours will do just fine."

"Ah, ya call me Mister Jenkins, do ya?" asked Jenkins with a smile on his face. Jonathan suddenly wondered if he was supposed to call Jenkins "Mister," but he really could not remember.

"Isn't that proper? To call you 'Mister'?" asked Jonathan.

"Possibly, if things had worked out in my favor earlier in life—but no, it is not. Remember, only those in uniform are Mist'ers," said Jenkins, "and only officers wear uniforms."

"And ya can call 'em 'sir' or 'Mister' if you like," said another man.

"True, Smith," said Jenkins. "You see, if ya greet an officer, say walking on deck, then use his name. For example, 'G' day to you, Mister Langley."

"And if an officer asks ya a question," said Smith, "and ya know the answer, then ya say, 'Yes, sir' or 'No, sir.' It's easy as pie."

Jonathan considered this. That made sense and did seem easy. To anyone in uniform, you say, "sir" and call them "Mister."



“If someone is not an officer?” asked Jonathan, “then I call them ‘mate’ or just use his name, right?”

“Exactly!” said Jenkins. “Now, you ‘ave it! So, if I were to introduce ya to Jones over there, sitting on the sack of rice, as it were?”

Jonathan thought on this for a moment and turned to Jones. He dressed in the same clothes as Jonathan, Claise, and Sean. He couldn’t be an officer.

“I would say, ‘A pleasure to meet you, Jones.’ And if he asked me a question, I would answer with just a plain yes or no.”

“Right as rain,” said Jones, “or ya could say ‘aye’ instead of ‘yes,’ but to each his own, I always say.”

Jenkins smiled and said, “So, you have it now, right?”

However, Jonathan had one more question. “How do I tell what is a uniform and what is not? You all seem as if you are wearing the same thing. Isn’t that a uniform?”

“No!” they shouted.

“You see, Jonathan,” continued Jenkins, “when we say ‘uniform,’ we mean a *naval officer’s* uniform. Our uniform is just plain seaman’s garb.”

“But you just said you’re in a uniform, didn’t ya?” asked Sean, sincerely.

“Aye, but not an *officer’s* uniform,” said Jenkins.

“So, then, Steward has that fancy coat and a tasseled hat,” Sean pointed out.

“He wears a uniform that is different from ours,” said Jonathan. “What should we call him?”

“Most call ’im an idiot,” said Jones.

“Or at times an imbecile or a moron,” said Smith with all seriousness. This caused a wave of laughter from the rest of the men.

“However,” interrupted Jenkins with a stern look at both Smith and Jones, “all should call ’em Steward, or mate. He wears the garb of a bosun, but his orders have not come through. He will be a warrant officer soon enough, and then we would call him Mister. For now, he is still a sailor and a hand, not an officer.”

“So officers have fancy uniforms, then?” Jonathan asked. “What do they look like?”

“You will find out soon enough,” Jenkins said, standing and taking each boy by the hand, “as we are now on to see the cap’n, and he is *the officer* and master of this vessel. He wears a uniform, and it will all be clear to you when you see it. No mistaking it for the garb we wear, I can tell ya that!”

Jenkins instructed Claise to help the other men set up large tables on the gundeck. Then he marched the boys up to the forecabin, then along the gangway to the rear of the *Poseidon* to see the captain.

The sun had all but set amid billowy clouds, though it still was able to find a hole to peek through and paint the buildings along the shore and the gentle waves in the harbor in rich purple and pink. The day’s last rays sparkled off the water like glittering gems. Jonathan could see Chatham’s gaslights coming on from across the water, and as beautiful as it seemed, he had no desire to return to land.

I don’t care if I ever go back, he thought.

Sean was also looking at Chatham, considering how hard and dismal his life had been to this point. Turning to Jonathan, he smiled, knowing they both were having the same thoughts: they wished never to return to the streets again, and they felt that their lives were about to change for the better.

When they reached the stern, Jenkins led them down a ladder and toward the rear of the ship. He had them sit on a wooden bench beside a tall, thin door. Jenkins knelt to their level. Eye to eye, he addressed them seriously.

“The cap’n’s quarters are through this ‘ere door,” whispered Jenkins, tilting his head toward the rear of the ship.

Jonathan and Sean turned to see a door with a little window in the center, curtains hiding the inside.

“Now, let ol’ Jenkins give ya some advice. The cap’n is a very important man, and on this ship, he’s the *most important* man. He doesn’t suffer fools gladly, I can tell ya that! Mind your p’s and q’s, and all will be right! Just answer ‘is questions, quickly and directly. A simple ‘yes, sir’ or ‘no, sir’ will usually do. And whatever ya do, don’t sit down! And don’t look ’em in the eye! Just keep ya eyes forward!”

“And call him Mister Walker, right?” asked Sean eagerly, hoping he now understood.

“By all the devils of Hades, no! You always call the cap’n ‘Captain’!”

Jonathan wondered at this. He was always to call the captain Captain. He was not to look Captain Walker in the eye or sit down—did Jenkins mean never to sit down? Ever? Or just not to sit when Captain Walker was present? It was all very confusing.

“Steward will be along any moment to bring ya in, one at a time, I’d imagine. Just sit tight ‘ere on this bench—an’ good luck to ya!”

He departed, leaving the boys alone to wait nervously.

After a short while, Jonathan and Sean realized that they could hear muffled voices coming from the other side of the captain’s door. Now and again, someone inside, who must have been Captain Walker, would release a thunderous and

ferocious growl.

“That’s what I mean!” the voice roared. “There needs to be more discipline on this ship, Mister Harrison! Stop going so easy on them!”

This outburst was followed by a moment of mutterings, a second or two of silence, and then another barrage: “Then stop the game playing and act like a leader! You need to project authority! Poise! And professionalism! For the sake of the king, Thomas Harrison, how will you ever be assigned your own ship someday?”

Jonathan wondered who this Thomas Harrison could be. He was certainly getting a tongue-lashing from the captain. He must be a genuine rogue, to be sure.

One final blast boomed so loudly that Jonathan and Sean actually jumped off the bench and stood upright.

“Then act like a leader! More discipline, Mister Harrison! That is what we need! Is that too much to ask? You are dismissed!”

With that, the boys could hear the door to Captain Walker’s cabin creak open. They expected Mister Harrison would be a dirty, ragged fool of a man. However, they were surprised when a neat and proper young man, maybe of nineteen years, with dark hair, deep blue eyes, and a clean-shaven chin, appeared.

As handsome and refined as he was, his most remarkable quality was not his facial features but his clothes. He did not wear the heavy, black wool coat like Steward and Koonts, nor the dark jacket, white blouse, and long gray pants of the crew. No, he wore a splendid royal-blue coat, with gold-and-white piping around the edges, gold buttons, and a high collar. He had tight white pantaloons cut smartly at the knee, where white stockings extended from the pants to black shoes with bright-gold buckles. A sword was at his side.

Jonathan realized that this must be the uniform Jenkins told them about, worn by the officers, the ones to be called “sir.” Now it was clear that those in the princely clothes were the officers, the “sirs,” and all others paled in comparison.

At this moment, Mister Harrison seemed more like a sad prince than an officer. The reprimand by the captain had obviously upset him greatly. His face was red, and a false smile hid his disappointment. His eyes seemed watery, but his chin and jaw stiffened to fight back his emotions. Jonathan and Sean immediately felt pity for the young man and wished that they could somehow cheer him.

Harrison glanced at the boys, then took a deep breath, turned his gaze to the front of the ship, and put on a splendid, two-pointed blue hat, also trimmed in gold and white. Jonathan and Sean snapped as straight as boards and, out of pure instinct, both said with a loud and clear voice, “Sir!”

Harrison only nodded sadly to them and walked away, head and eyes down, and took the ladder up to the quarterdeck.

As they watched him depart, Steward appeared holding a tray of something hot and steaming. The smell wafted to Jonathan and Sean, and the aroma entranced them. Their stomachs growled, and they licked their lips like dogs, wondering what was on the plate.

“Ah! Knock it off, ya cretins! What are ya, daft?” said Steward, cuffing them both with his free hand. “This is fer Cap’n Walker! It’s his anchovies and toasted cheese, one of my specialties! Among other duties, I’m the cap’n’s official servant, ya see? His bosun, it seems, from time to time, if ya must know. I take care of him, so mind yer manners and stop that incessant drooling! Ya look like you haven’t eaten in a week!”

“We’ve only eaten once this week!” Jonathan cried.

“And only a cheese sandwich!” added Sean.

“Aye! Then just ‘old on a bit longer, lads! Ya have to see the cap’n right away! Flagon! Stand up! Straighten that back and follow me down. Once inside the cap’n’s cabin, keep yer eyes on the far window. Just stand straight, say, ‘yes, sir’ and ‘no, sir,’ and keep yer wits about ya! It will all be over soon!”

Sean moved slowly toward the door, now extremely nervous and shaking visibly. It seemed to Jonathan as if Sean were about to cry. The yelling they had heard directed at Mister Harrison had them both anxious.

“Don’t worry, Sean, I’m right out here. I won’t let anything happen to you.”

“I don’t know,” said Sean. “I’m plenty scared!”

“And I’m tired of yer yammerin’!” said Steward, “Just get in there!”

And with a firm push of Steward’s foot, Sean was sliding toward the door and into the captain’s cabin, followed immediately by Steward, the anchovies and cheese, and some mumbling about cretinous landlubbers. The door hastily slammed shut.

As he waited, Jonathan glanced about the ship, again amazed at all the activity. Many of the crew, possibly two hundred men, were busy completing all sorts of tasks. There was a crew sweeping the deck, pushing wood clippings and spent pieces of rope through small openings in the side rail. Jonathan could hear some of the larger pieces splash into the water below. Another crewman followed them with buckets of water and splashed them on the wooden planking. Still, another team used huge circular stones to scrape and grind the wood where the men had dumped the water. They sang songs about the life at sea, treasure, and gun battles—each one an adventure, and each seeming strange and exciting to

Jonathan.

Other men climbed what appeared to be circus ropes and nets that were used as ladders of sorts, some reaching terrifyingly high, up to the top of each mast. Some men stopped halfway and balanced precariously across a side bar of the mast as if they were climbing on the cross of a giant letter T. Jonathan believed that he would never be able to perform such a feat. Then, as if a ghost were whispering words in his head, he heard a voice saying, "When you climb mast rigging, Jonathan, just look up; never look down." Suddenly Jonathan remembered that those words were his father's, and he had said them years ago. At the time, Jonathan didn't understand what those words meant; however, could it be that his father was talking about a sailing ship? But his father wasn't a sailor, was he? He thought for a moment, though he could not remember.

All about the ship, it seemed everyone knew his duty, his job, and was happy about it. Mister Harrison walked among the sailors, giving directions in that strange language Jonathan was just beginning to learn. In fact, he even saw Mister Harrison telling the older men what to do, and they listened to him and called him "sir!" That was odd to Jonathan, but the whole incredible ship seemed strange, like a happy kitchen, with all sorts of people and machines grinding, sloshing, and singing, always in constant motion.

Over the last few years, Jonathan had come to the London docks with Sean from time to time and had seen ships with a few small sails out, coming into port after their long journeys. However, he had never seen them with all sails filled with wind, billowing large, as large as clouds. The *Poseidon* seemed to have no sails out at the moment, and Jonathan supposed that it was all well and good, as men were still loading supplies. If the sails were out, wouldn't the ship move? It only made sense, he thought. There is so much to learn and do!

"I wonder what my job will be," Jonathan said aloud, just as Steward came out of the captain's door with Sean.

"Ya may find out soon enough, Mister Moore. Yer up!"

Jonathan looked at Sean. It was a relief to see that he seemed no worse for wear.

"How was it, Sean?" whispered Jonathan.

"He's a serious fellow, Captain Walker is. But fine, too," Sean answered. "He asked mostly questions about you and \_\_\_"

"Now, now!" interrupted Steward. "The business the cap'n had with ya, Sean, is no one else's business. Tell no one what the cap'n tells ya unless he tells ya to!"

"Pardon?" said Sean, not understanding at all.

"Just let's 'ave ya over to help Claise with those thar tables!" Steward said. "Get a move on, Flagon."

Sean patted Jonathan on the shoulder and smiled as he walked away toward what he hoped would eventually include a hot meal.

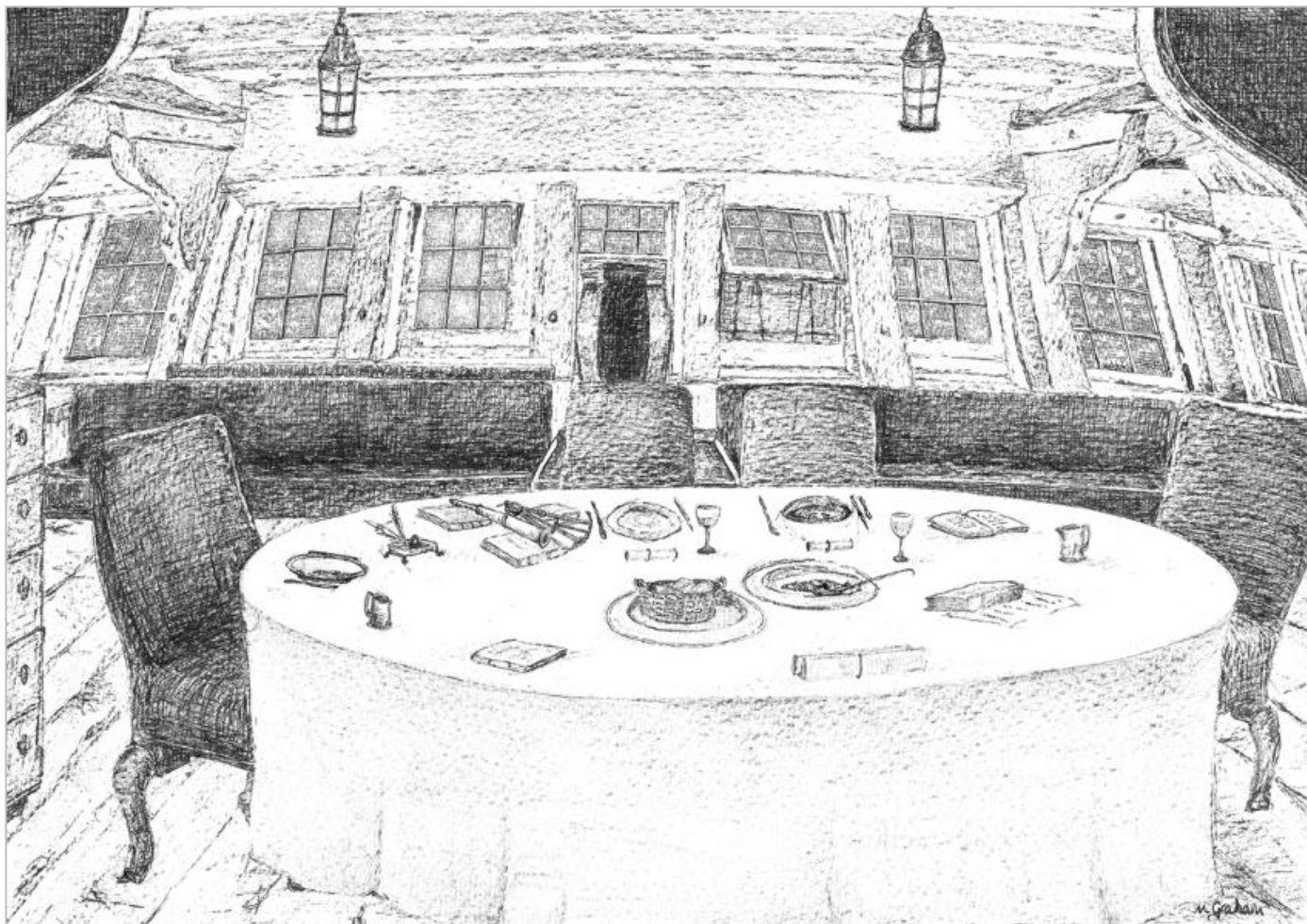
"And now, Mister Moore, go on in, speak when spoken to, and stand straight! And that ridiculous cap! Oh, by the saints and sinners," Steward cried. With his free hand, he snatched the worn, wet cap off Jonathan's head, quickly walked over to the ladder, and threw it over the rail.

With a gasp of alarm, Jonathan ran up the ladder and rushed to the rail. He saw the wool hat, the one that had kept him warm all those nights, now floating on the waves below. Within seconds, it sank into the sea.

"Yer in His Majesty's Navy now, Mister Moore," Steward said firmly. "New world, new life."

With that, he took Jonathan's hand, led him down the ladder, and nudged him into the cabin to face Captain Walker.

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*The Captain's Cabin*

The room was not as dark as Jonathan's closet, though it still required a few moments for his eyes to adjust. He could soon make out a large table in the center, lit by two lanterns hung from the low beams of the ceiling. The glow fell upon a table with many maps and strange devices made of golden metal, with dials and wheels. There was also food on the table, half-eaten from the looks of it, but the aroma was still wonderful.

Jonathan noticed Mister Koonts sitting at the table, glancing through his large book. He nibbled on something that appeared delicious to Jonathan, a soft cake of some sort with whipped cream filling. Next to him was another man, dressed just like Mister Harrison, but slightly older and a little more, well, decorated, as his uniform had a few extra frills and what appeared to be medals pinned upon it. He was tall and slim, with a serious expression on his face as he studied the charts and maps on the table.

"Would there be any more cake?" the man asked Koonts in a clear and proper gentleman's voice.

"Why, yes, Lieutenant Langley, and it is quite good, not any of Steward's slop, I can tell you. This came from Hinkhaus Bakery in Kensington," Koonts replied. "May I plate you a piece?"

"Yes, please," Langley said, finally looking up. Handsome he was, with thick chestnut hair and a clean-shaven face. His bright blue eyes met Jonathan's for an instant, and he seemed to have just smiled a small bit; however, Jonathan could not be certain.

So this is Lieutenant Langley, Jonathan thought. Obviously an important man to be sure, but where is Captain Walker?

He then saw someone stir in a dark corner of the room by a tall wooden chest against the wall. The figure was fussing with some papers and muttering a bit to himself. He eventually turned to face the others, approaching the table and carrying an envelope that he apparently had just taken from the chest. As he moved into the light, his uniform became visible, and the sight made Jonathan gasp. There was no doubt anymore: this was Captain Walker. To be sure, he looked like a king, dressed much the same as Mister Langley, though with more silver and gold piping about his jacket, slightly fancier medals, and a ribbon or two on his shoulders as well.

The captain appeared much older than Langley, and his graying hair was short and thinning a bit on the top. He had no beard or mustache about his square chin. His jaw seemed permanently set in a serious manner, and even his grunts and

sighs that escaped from his thin lips seemed to carry an air of confidence. Walker sat down heavily, and Jonathan could see that his face was in a constant frown marked by deep-set wrinkles in his forehead. His skin seemed almost leathery, as if he stood on the front of the ship as it sailed, years on end, peering endlessly ahead through his cool gray eyes. He sat at the table, at its head, of course. Setting the envelope down next to his plate, he reached for an anchovy from the tray before him.

Steward pushed Jonathan closer, just a few feet from the table. Jonathan quickly stood at rigid attention and stopped his staring at the great man. He remembered what Jenkins had told him to do—just stand and look out the window—so he did.

After picking up a few empty plates and glasses from the table, Steward retreated out the door with a slight tip of his cap. The captain simply mumbled something and waved his hand at Steward in dismissal.

Jonathan could feel the boat gently rising and falling in the waves, and through the window of the cabin, he could see the lights of the city beyond. But it was what he couldn't see from this position—the ocean—that called to him, offering boundless adventure. At that moment, Jonathan knew that his desire was to stay on this ship forever. It is just like a home, he thought, with two hundred brothers all working and playing together. And I just cannot wait until I see those sails, all spread out and filled with wind! I wouldn't want to miss it for the world!

Then Captain Walker looked up.

“And who do we have here?” he asked in a deep and proper tone.

“This,” said Koonts, “is, ahem, a certain Mister Jonathan Moore, of no particular address, London, sir.”

Captain Walker regarded Jonathan without saying a word. He inspected him with unblinking eyes as one would study a thing almost unreal, like a ghost. He grunted and murmured something. Then, after a long moment, he picked up what appeared to be a letter, all torn and ripped at the edges and yellowed with stains and creases. The captain read a few parts of the letter to himself and looked back at Jonathan from time to time. He would then tenderly set the letter down on the table as if it were some sacred relic or a very rare and expensive treasure.

“Jonathan Moore? Is that your full name?” Walker said in a firm voice.

“Yes, sir, Captain,” Jonathan replied.

The captain smiled. “I see you have some manners, and you know how to address a ship's captain. Good. I hear you volunteered, is that correct?”

“Yes, sir, Captain,” Jonathan replied.

“That is also good. I will remember the fact. It may aid you someday, to be sure.” The captain paused, looked at the paper again, and glanced back and forth from it to Jonathan.

“A boy of just twelve years should not be wandering the streets of London alone, living god knows where,” he stated. “Let me ask, where are your parents?”

“I am not sure of my father, Captain, sir. Years ago, he went off to work, then disappeared. At least that is what my aunt told me. My mother and I went to live with her in Norwich after my father left.”

“Then, where is your mother now?” the captain asked softly, almost appearing sad and concerned.

“After we moved to Norwich, my mother caught a deep fever, sir. She...she died right before the winter of ninety-seven.”

“I am sorry to hear that, Jonathan,” the captain said after a pause. He bowed his head in silence for a moment. “And this aunt? Her name?”

“Emma, sir. Emma Bodden. My mother's sister,” Jonathan replied.

The captain referred to the letter again, scanning through it carefully, turning it over. Then it seemed to Jonathan that the captain nodded to Langley and Koonts, and they nodded back.

“Now, young Mister Moore,” Langley asked softly, “can you remember anything about your father? Anything at all?”

“Not too much, sir, I am sorry. My aunt never spoke of him. However, I do remember a...painting. It was in our den. He was wearing a blue coat. And now that I think of it, much like the ones you and Mister Harrison wear, but I had never seen one quite like it before—until today. And he told me once that when one climbs rigging, whatever that is, one should never look down.”

Captain Walker smiled a broad grin. “Can you tell me his full name?”

“Like I told Mister Koonts here, sir, his name was Nathaniel Moore,” Jonathan said.

The captain looked back at the letter, then at a few more documents, and then to his officers. They both nodded again.

Jonathan found this very peculiar.

“Well, Mister Moore,” the captain said, now serious once again. “It just so happens that I have a position for a young gentleman to join in basic seamanship training. Then, if the fates allow, he could move ahead to become a midshipman and attend midshipman's school. Are you interested?”

“Begging your pardon, sir,” Jonathan said, “but what is a midshipman? How does one train for such a position?”

“A midshipman,” the captain explained, “is a young man who has completed basic seamanship school and then is assigned to one of His Majesty’s naval vessels—possibly a fighting ship like the *Poseidon* here. One must complete rigorous classes and be rated an able seaman before being promoted to midshipman and continuing his schooling. As a matter of fact, our Mister Harrison has recently finished his midshipman training. He is now assigned to me as a lieutenant. This will be his first official cruise as an officer. I have to admit that, mostly, midshipmen are an aggravation and a caution as well, and I don’t volunteer to take them often. However, in your case, I will make an exception if you are courteous and mind your duties.”

Jonathan’s heart sank. What was this basic seamanship school—and where was it? How long would he have to attend? And, when finished, would he still have to go to midshipman’s school before getting assigned to a ship? Jonathan was so excited about being on the *Poseidon* that the idea of having to leave now to go to some tedious school—in stinky old London, no doubt, for probably years—well, it just broke his heart.

“If it’s all the same to you, Captain, I decline. No, thank you, sir.”

Captain Walker seemed surprised. Langley and Koonts simply wore looks of shock.

“And why not?” asked the captain, startled. “Many full-grown men never have the chance to become midshipmen. Certainly, they can become an able or ordinary seaman, but never can they move beyond that to become an officer. One usually needs a letter from a naval captain or admiral to be recommended as a midshipman. It is an honor!”

“And Jonathan,” whispered Koonts as he leaned closer, “being an officer can mean a pretty future for anyone who completes the training. It is a once-in-a-lifetime chance! Why won’t you take it?”

“Well, sir,” stammered Jonathan, now thinking he had offended the captain and Mister Koonts. “I-I...because I want to stay on the *Poseidon*, sir. I love it already—all the men and the ropes and sails, and the guns, especially! They are not called ‘cannon,’ as I am sure you know. ‘Cannon’ is for cretinous landlubbers, I have learned. I heard there is even food on this ship, and sometimes, I would presume, it may even be hot! I’ve only been on board for less than an hour, but it already seems like a home to me! To have to leave and sit in some seamanship schoolhouse for years while you depart with the *Poseidon* and sail on the ocean—well, it would break my heart!”

The captain looked at Jonathan sternly. Slowly his face seemed to crack and finally break into a jolly laugh. Soon Mister Koonts was wheezing in his high-pitched squeak, his face turning red. Langley just smiled, and his chest heaved as he tried not to laugh out loud. Soon, all were chortling so hard that even Jonathan joined in.

“What is so funny, Captain?” he managed to ask after a long spell of laughing.

“Jonathan,” the captain said, “the school for seamanship and midshipmen is onboard this ship!”

“Some ships have two or three boys learning to be seamen,” said Langley, “and a few midshipmen training to become officers. We call them ‘young gentlemen,’ and as for your teachers, well, you have the captain, of course, and Steward, Mister Harrison, Mister Koonts here, and, from time to time, I may even teach you a thing or two about navigation. And what better way for you to learn about the ocean and fighting ships than to have classes right onboard HMS *Poseidon*?”

Jonathan paused for a split second and then was overcome with great joy as he realized his good fortune. He could stay on the *Poseidon*! He would sail the oceans, see faraway lands, and be part of something grand: His Majesty’s Navy. This, he thought, just had to be the best day of his life.

“Well,” asked the captain, “now do you accept?”

“Nothing would make me happier, Captain Walker! Yes, sir, I accept, and I volunteer!”

Captain Walker let out another large laugh. “Jonathan, it is all well and good. Steward and Mister Harrison will be your first instructors in basic seamanship. The other men will also assist until you know your way about. Learn what you can, whenever you can, Mister Moore. That is my advice to you.”

“I thank you kindly, sir,” Jonathan said happily.

“Steward will assign your duties tomorrow,” said Captain Walker, “and as for tonight, enjoy some dinner on deck with the men—then to bed early. Tomorrow we sail for the coast of Africa and cruise for French ships and the like. You are dismissed!”

Jonathan stood at attention. He made no movement whatsoever. He wondered what “dismissed” meant and not knowing for sure, he believed it would be best not to move at all.

“That means you can leave now,” said Langley softly, smiling.

“Oh! Yes, sir! Pardon me, Captain!”

Jonathan smiled widely, then performed a sort of clumsy bow to Koonts, then another for the captain and Langley. He walked backward to the door, never turning his back on the officers until he took their leave.

The captain, Mister Langley, and Koonts sat in the cabin’s dim light and smiled deeply. They sipped their coffee and nibbled on a few treats left by Steward, and from time to time, they even chuckled.

“That is one part of the mission completed, sir,” said Langley. “A stroke of luck it was that Steward found him after

all this time, eh?"

Walker nodded, and then his smile slowly faded. He became serious and quiet as he thought for a moment and then looked sternly at the others.

"Yes, that is one mission put to bed. However, there is more to it. Let us not even discuss the past—or the future—as far as Jonathan Moore is concerned. Especially to Jonathan himself."

"Sir?" asked Koonts. "Why is that, if I may ask?"

"We have been requested to keep the entire story quiet. The letter specifically pleads that no information is to be given to the boy unless all plans are successful," said Walker. "There are too many pieces still left to chance, and though we may not enjoy it, and it may be difficult, that is the plan."

"But what of those who know too much?" asked Koonts. "How do we stop tongues from wagging? As they say, nothing is faster than ship's gossip, sir."

"I have instructed a few of the hands myself, and Lieutenant Langley has warned all the rest. Of course, they will need to be reminded from time to time, I am sure of it. Under fear of strict punishment, the hands will keep their words in check."

"Yes, sir," Koonts replied solemnly.

"I will do my part and pray that all ends well," added Langley.

## 4

### *A Hot Steaming Bowl*

Jonathan was now as happy as a lark in a garden. Not only did he have a position, but he also had a purpose: to stay aboard the *Poseidon* and begin his study of all the essential matters necessary for sailing a fine ship in his Majesty's Navy. Walking the upperdeck, he marveled at all the mysterious fittings, ropes, and machines that were part of the ship. At that moment, he decided it would be his private ambition to become well educated in all terminology and with the purpose of each part of the great ship. He would become as able as any man aboard.

His path finally led him to find Steward, who was standing next to a dozen or so large tables, made by laying planks of wood across crates and the like. There were lanterns strung about to light the scene. To Jonathan, it seemed festive, a party of sorts. Some men were sitting and laughing and talking as they ate from large wooden bowls. Others were singing, and the song seemed joyful and lively. At times, all of the men joined in when they knew the words.

Jonathan noticed Sean and Claise were standing next to Steward, who was stirring the steamy contents of a large metal pot with a long wooden spoon. His friends stared at the pot with sad faces.

"What is the matter, Sean?" asked Jonathan.

"There is a great big pot of steaming fish stew!" said Sean.

"That sounds delicious! What could be wrong with that?" Jonathan asked.

"Because," said Claise, "it is just our luck that we can't eat any!"

"And why not?" cried Jonathan, now also sad. The pot of stew looked enormous, and as he peered into it, he could see carrots, potatoes, and big chunks of white fish, all in a thick broth. The spices they used must have come from India because even Jonathan could recognize the wonderfully sweet smell of curry. Just the sight of the soup made Jonathan swoon. He hadn't eaten food like this in such a long time.

"It just so 'appens," said Claise, "that you get a bed, a blanket, new clothes, as they are, and a meal on this ship—but no bowl to eat it with!"

Just then, Lieutenant Harrison approached, saw them not eating, and shortly addressed Steward.

"Steward? What is going on here?"

"Beg yer pardon, *sir*," said Steward, overemphasizing the title, "but they 'ave no bowls. I couldn't just have 'em cup their hands and pour hot steaming fish stew into 'em, now, could I?"

Jonathan considered this, and though it would undoubtedly be painful, he was very hungry. Maybe pouring the hot soup in his hands would not be too much to bear.

"Steward," Harrison said, "I would think a man of even your limited intelligence would figure something out. I am sure we must have a bowl somewhere that is available for these men."

"I would remind the *new lieutenant* that I am the cap'n's steward, not even a bosun officially, and certainly not the cook o' this ship, as it were," said Steward, "and I am just fillin' in. Cooking fer hundreds is quite a bit different than cooking fer a few officers."

"My stomach and I are painfully aware of the fact that you are the *temporary* cook," replied Harrison. "Though it doesn't take a cook to know what a bowl is, does it?"

"Sir. I do know a bowl when I see one, and I also know that all bowls are bein' used. Ever' last one," answered

Steward, who smiled as he felt he had outsmarted the young Harrison. “We’ ave a full complement of men ‘n boys now. Stores and supplies are limited.”

“Oh, really?” Harrison said as he smiled. “Just a moment then.”

He turned sharply, marched across the deck, and disappeared down a hatchway. All waited, wondering. In a moment, Harrison reappeared with three small pots, presumably from the ship’s galley.

“Steward, these articles are called *pots*,” Harrison instructed as he passed one each to Jonathan, Sean, and Claise. “And though used for cooking,” he continued, “they work remarkably well as bowls. It’s the similar shape, yes?”

The men within earshot laughed and snorted, though Steward only frowned, knowing that Harrison had outsmarted him.

“Aye, sir,” he mumbled.

As Mister Harrison tipped his hat to the men and walked away, the boys and Claise bowed in respect and then turned to Steward, thrusting their pots forward in unison to be filled.

“If ya please?” asked Claise.

Grumbling under his breath, Steward emptied two big scoops of the aromatically enticing stew into each pot. He then instructed Jonathan, Sean, and Claise to take some “soft-tack,” as it was called—a bread roll—from a large sack on the nearest table, and a spoon as well.

“I wonder why it is called soft-tack,” said Jonathan.

“Wait till you try hard-tack,” said Steward. “Ya will then know. ‘opefully, ya won’t be missin’ any teeth after the first bite.”

Jonathan wondered about that, but either hard or soft, it was food. He eagerly selected a piece from the sack. Each roll was soft and bigger than Jonathan’s hands cupped together, and he thankfully sat down alongside his friends to eat.

The first bite was heaven—and hot as well. The wonderful curry taste and meaty fish with a bit of carrot and potato made his mouth tingle. It had been so long since Jonathan tasted good food that he had almost forgotten how excellent it was. He quickly ate all in his pot and then used the bread to soak up every last drop and morsel left in the bowl. A man came to them and offered cups of goat’s milk, which Jonathan eyed suspiciously but drank after Sean assured him it was certainly acceptable.

As they finished the last of their stew, Harrison reappeared on deck.

“Stow for sea!” he called. “Secure those tables! Jenkins, take in all arms and planks. We sail in the morning! No one gets on or off this ship except for Mister Langley!”

Harrison then joined Jonathan, Sean, and Claise at their table. He smiled widely and seemed in better spirits than they had seen him when he exited the captain’s cabin just an hour ago.

“Well, you must be Claise—and you, Flagon! Welcome aboard, men. And you,” he said, smiling at Jonathan, “you must certainly be Jonathan Moore! I hear you are to become one of the ship’s young gentlemen. The captain was impressed with you, no doubt.”

“Yes, sir, Mister Harrison, I am blessed to be sure,” said Jonathan.

“I finished my last cruise as a midshipman aboard HMS *Helios*,” continued Harrison, “and just recently, I have passed my examination board and am a new lieutenant!”

“Congratulations, Mister Harrison!” said Jonathan, Sean, and Claise.

“Oh! Thank you very much,” Harrison said, beaming. “I know you have a few years to learn basic seamanship, Jonathan, but it will go quickly, and then you will be a midshipman. Mine was hard training, and sometimes I actually believed I would not make it to the end. Nonetheless, I prevailed with much luck and industry, and now I am honored to be aboard the *Poseidon*. Captain Walker has a reputation of evenhandedness, unlike some other commanders. Not all are like him. He is fair and firm with the men, but not ever mean or spiteful. And he is well respected—and not afraid to fight! We should all be thankful for our good fortune.”

“I will try my best to please, Mister Harrison,” said Jonathan.

“And see? Here is my point exactly!” Harrison said, pointing to the gangway. “Look there, isn’t that Robinson? The man who tried to run away?”

All turned to the gangway, and sure enough, it was Robinson. He was standing next to Koonts with his hat in his hands. He nodded as Koonts spoke and bowed in respect. He then shook hands with Mister Koonts, turned, and walked down the gang-plank.

“The captain listened to Robinson’s story,” Harrison continued. “It is compassion and fairness that guides him.”

“He is letting him go?” asked Claise with surprise.

“It seems as such,” said Harrison. “As I said, the captain is a fair man and a kind one. Robinson’s family must be important to him, and Captain Walker sympathized with his predicament.”

“I ‘ave no one, really,” said Claise, though he did not appear to be unhappy about that fact. “A few blokes I met in the ironworks, but no one special as you might think.”



“Well, you have us now, don’t ya?” said Sean matter-of-factly, “And we have you. So we are now all in the family, right?”

Jonathan thought of this, and it was exactly how he felt. He smiled at Sean and patted him on the back. Claise smiled as well and continued eating.

“And what is it that we are to do together, Mister Harrison?” Jonathan asked shyly.

“Whatever do you mean?” responded Harrison.

“I mean, do we just sail around? Do we explore new lands?”

“Oh!” laughed Harrison, “I see. Well, we are at war, men. Ours is a general mission at the heart of it, and that is to defeat the French and Spanish as they try to take over all of Europe. The French general, Napoleon, is a madman, some say, and we mean to stop him. So I am sure we will see plenty of action.”

“Action?” asked Sean. “What kind of action?”

“Fighting. Sea battles. That sort of action,” answered Harrison with a grin.

That made the three newcomers pause and think of what their part would be in this war. Jonathan believed that no matter what he had to do, it would be exciting, to say the least.

“I heard you have been living on the streets just these past few years,” said Mister Harrison. “A tough life?”

“Yes, a tough life, sir,” said Claise as he swallowed the last of his soup.

“And one with very little food, if you catch my meaning, Mister Harrison,” said Sean, holding up his now-empty bowl.

Harrison smiled. He waved at Steward to get his attention.

“Steward, considering these men are new and obviously appreciative of your cooking, which is beyond my understanding, but to each his own, serve them another bowl and some bread. Then dump that mess you call dinner overboard and secure the pots and pans below. Good luck, men. You and your stomachs will need it!”

With that, Harrison was off, giving orders to secure the ship as he went. Jonathan, Sean, and Claise finished another big steaming bowl of fish stew and complimented Steward on his excellent cooking.

“I could eat your fish stew at every meal!” claimed Jonathan.

“I will remind ya o’ that comment in a few weeks, Mister Moore!” Steward said with a laugh.

“I would suggest,” offered Claise, “that a lit ‘le cardamom goes a long way to sweeten a dish—though if not available, some black pepper can hide the taste of strong meat.”

“Oh, really?” said Steward, annoyed. “Is there anyone else who is an expert on cooking, then? Anyone?”

“Begging you pardon,” said Claise shyly. “I meant no disrespect.”

Steward just frowned and shook his head as he started to collect his pots and pans.

“That’s all I receive from most: disrespect,” continued Steward sourly. “As if everyone was a chef from a royal palace or some such.”

“Not a palace—just a factory, actually,” added Claise.

Steward stopped his work. He looked at Claise with an interested smile.

“A factory?” repeated Steward.

“Just a metalworks is all. I cooked there for a few years, as lunch and dinner was a part of the pay. But they closed down, went away. So did all the work.”

“Is that how you ended up on the streets?” asked Jonathan.

“What did ya make?” interrupted Steward loudly, now deeply interested.

“Soups, porridge in the mornin’, bread, and the like. Now and then a stew,” Claise said. “For about a hundred men a day, I’d say.”

Steward froze his gaze with eyes wide open and seemed to be set in stone for a complete quarter of a minute. His face cracked into a broad grin, and he giggled almost uncontrollably.

“Close enough!” gasped Steward. “Ah, the stars do shine on we lowly servants o’ the empire from time to time! Splendid, Claise, splendid! Tomorrow, ya will start yer ship’s trainin’ on cookin’.”

“The empire?” asked Sean. “What is that?”

But Steward was too happy to answer, having found a new cook and a way back to a more simple life. He finished clearing a few items and then addressed the new mates happily.

“And now that you’ve finished supper, it’s time to retire to yer quarters and enjoy a good night’s sleep. Tomorrow ya are to rise and shine at the first bell—ya will ‘ear it loud and clear—and come find me, ya hear? I will give ya assignments and some training on the ship’s rules ‘n regulations. Maybe even a bit o’ breakfast with the ‘elp of Claise, eh? Agreeable to ya?”

They all nodded in unison, as it did sound most agreeable, especially the part about breakfast.

“Then sleep tight, me boys,” said Steward, “fer tomorrow mornin’ at eight bells, we make sail. A cruise to Africa, I believe, so be ready for anything!”

“Eight bells?” asked Jonathan.

“It’s a complicated thing, boys,” Steward said, holding up his hand and speaking slowly. “For now—when you’ ear eight bells—and if the sun is up—come find me. Do ya understand?”

“Aye, Steward!”

“Ha!” Steward laughed. “They can be taught!”

They left their pots and spoons on the table and walked across the deck, dodging groups of men working to secure the *Poseidon* for the evening. Jonathan, Sean, and Claise found ladders leading them down belowdecks. It was now so dark that they could hardly see, though they were able to use a little candlelight spilling in from a vessel in the passageway to find the closet once again.

Jonathan found three blankets tucked in one of the cabinets, one for each of them. He used his to make a fine bed for himself on the hammock. Claise chuckled a bit as he watched the boys climb into their beds with just a few slips and falls and an “ouch” here and there. Finally, safely situated, they all laid their heads down upon their pillows, those being just sacks stuffed with rags—but comfortable, nonetheless.

This is certainly more agreeable than sleeping in an alley, thought Jonathan. Compared to the wooden box, this closet is lavishly comfortable and warm besides!

As he began to doze, he wondered if the three of them could be thinking of the same things: although it would be a difficult time learning the ship’s ways and the ways of the navy, it certainly was better than wandering the streets, searching for a meal, and trying to stay away from trouble. Life at sea might be difficult, as he had heard other homeless orphans of London say. However, they also said you never slept or received a meal, and yet here he was with a tummy full of good food and a warm, dry place to sleep. Jonathan had to admit: the ship, with its many men, would probably be cramped and busy, but there was a sense of order to it all and a sense of belonging. As long as one followed the rules, did a hard day’s work, things would most likely be agreeable. On the streets of London, Jonathan had always worked hard; however, all he’d received in return was a poor night’s sleep and less than a little food.

As the waves gently rocked the ship and the ropes creaked softly in time, Jonathan realized that as part of the *Poseidon*’s crew, he would learn something about the world and see a good portion of it as well. And this time, his hard work would be rewarded with adventure.

“Jonathan,” whispered Sean, as the ship calmly swayed back and forth beneath them like a strong and caring mother, “this is the luckiest day of our lives, don’t you think?”

Jonathan just smiled as he drifted off to sleep, already dreaming of far-off places, large billowy sails in the moonlight, and the ocean rushing past him, with stars to guide his way.

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Jonathan stirred in his hammock and wondered if it had all been a dream: his boarding the great HMS *Poseidon*, the meeting with Captain Walker, and the excellent fish stew. However, looking about, he could see the closet to which he had been assigned. He saw the lockers on the wall, Sean’s empty hammock, and Claise’s empty bed.

It is true! he realized. I am aboard a sailing ship! And where is Sean? And Claise? Is it morning yet? Are they already awake? And why do I feel strange?

Jonathan was not only rocking gently from side to side in the waves as he had been the night before; he could feel that he was also moving up and down. The combined, gentle motions of the ship were so pleasant that he felt the urge to fall back to sleep. And he almost did.

An idea then came to him: the ship must be moving! Rising and falling through the waves. What a pleasing feeling! Why would the ship be moving? It must be out to sea!

With a shock, he realized the ship actually *was out to sea*; it had left Chatham.

“Oh no!” he cried aloud. “I missed it! I missed the sails! I have overslept!”

He sat up abruptly, banging his head against the low ceiling of the room. He fell off the hammock all the way to the floor with a thud. Even though his head hurt and throbbed painfully, he paid it no mind. Jonathan ran out of the closet and up the ladder, to the upperdeck.

The glare of sunlight made him quickly close his eyes, and he had to work hard to open them once again. He could feel the breeze against his face, blowing his hair about, and as his eyes became accustomed to the light, he looked out to the horizon. There he saw the pale-blue sky spotted with billowy clouds towering hundreds if not thousands of feet upwards. They seemed to grow from the sea itself, sprouting like great white-barked trees, with massive white leaves bunched thickly together, twisting and curling as the wind currents spread them wide and full. Large birds of the like he had never seen gracefully swirled by the ship, the morning sun glistening off their silver wingtips. Now and again, they would cry out their strange but beautiful calls, and that made Jonathan smile.

He could see no land to any side and at once was struck with the realization that he was far out to sea, surrounded by

miles and miles of dark-blue water. He was not afraid of this feeling; in fact, the idea of being upon the great expanse of the Atlantic Ocean excited him.

He looked down the length of the ship toward the front and saw men calmly tying ropes, painting, and polishing the vessel. Others were clearing tables that had obviously been set for breakfast—a breakfast he had missed—by oversleeping.

We are moving quite nicely, he thought, and ran to the rail. Looking down, he saw the water was roaring past in a white, foaming streak. The sense of great speed was apparent immediately. The ocean is hurrying past faster than any river I have ever seen! he said to himself. I never presumed a ship could move so quickly! Each and every one of the sails must be out!

Then he looked up.

Stretched above him was sail upon sail, every one of them as big as a house, almost blocking out the sky. All were pulled tight, and each seemed wider than the ship itself. The mainmast in the center of the *Poseidon* had not just one, but four square sails stacked one atop another, reaching high above the deck. Jonathan believed the topmost sail must have been touching the clouds. He observed the masts at the front, then the rear of the ship. Each had four square sails as well, and there were other sails of a triangular shape rigged between each mast. Two more extended like the tails of a bird behind the ship, all filled entirely with the wind. As the morning sun fell upon them, the sails shone a brilliant white, and Jonathan let out a gasp as he tried to take in every bit of canvas all at once. They were so large and high that he had to tilt his head almost impossibly backward to take them all in. This caused him to fall right over on his back.

As he lay upon the deck, he gazed upward to see men climbing among the sails and ropes, walking along the wooden beams that jutted out from each of the three tall masts. The men yelled out strange words to each other in that beautiful, mysterious language Jonathan yearned to know.

“Oh, what I wouldn’t give to be up there, walking among the sails on one of those crossbeams!” he said aloud as he struggled to his feet.

“Those crossbeams are called yards, Jonathan, and we are cracking on, as we like to say, meaning that all the sails are let out, and a good wind is behind us. We are moving along at approximately nine knots. Not bad for a start.”

Jonathan stood up to see Mister Harrison.

“Jonathan, I was just sent by the captain to see if you were awake!”

“Oh, sir! I missed it! I missed it!” said Jonathan as he brushed himself off as best he could. “I wanted to watch the sails come down!”

“We call that ‘loosing sail,’ and I must tell you that you missed breakfast too. Didn’t you hear the bell?” Harrison asked. “Throughout each day, the ship’s bell rings at first light, and all sailors with watch duty must wake and begin their duties. They take breakfast shortly after they start working.”

Jonathan was not feeling too hungry; after all, he had eaten two huge bowls of fish stew the night before and had two large pieces of soft-tack as well. Nevertheless, a little breakfast would be welcome.

“It is too late, Jonathan,” said Harrison, seemingly reading his mind. “The tables are struck, and Steward is waiting! Your friends, Sean and Claise, have already been assigned their duties and are hard at work after honey and biscuits! You had better go find Steward before all the good jobs have been taken! He is at the bow, waiting for you.”

“The bow? That is the front, right?” asked Jonathan.

“Yes. The front of the ship is the bow, and the back is the stern. But if you walk forward, it is just called fore, and if you walk backward, it is called aft.”

“Bow? Stern? Fore and aft?” muttered Jonathan. “How do you remember all of it?”

“I always think of it like this,” said Harrison. “The stern is where all the stern people are, like the captain, Mister Koonts, and Watt, the sailing master. He steers the *Poseidon*. All very stern officers.”

“I will not forget that!” smiled Jonathan. “The stern—full of stern people!”

“To remember the bow,” Harrison continued, “I always think that you bow forward. Get it? Bow fore-ward?” Mister Harrison turned to the front of the ship and performed an elegant bow as an example. This made Jonathan chuckle.

“Yes, yes, that makes it easy!” said Jonathan. “I walk fore to the bow and aft to the stern people!”

“Capital, Mister Moore! Capital!” said Harrison as he patted Jonathan on the back.

“Off to see Steward, then!” said Jonathan. “And I thank you!”

As he left Mister Harrison, he looked for a glimpse of Sean, but all he could see were older men and a few boys his age, all working. Now and again, he saw some very straight and tall men wearing bright-scarlet jackets, tall hats, fancy sashes, and white pantaloons. They held long muskets and marched in pairs around the upperdeck and the fo’c’sle, but never on the quarterdeck. He had seen men dressed like this on London’s streets, usually around the docks, and he remembered that they were Royal Marines. They appeared grand and serious, and they now eyed him suspiciously. Jonathan smiled at one, though the marine simply frowned back and grunted.

He moved past men painting and cleaning. Some were sewing patches in a large piece of cloth with huge needles and

thread as thick as a blade of straw. He stopped to watch for a while as one man patched a hole about the size of a large dinner plate.

“Excuse me, mate,” Jonathan said, “but what made that hole in such a strong and fine sail?”

The man looked up from his work and eyed Jonathan carefully. He had a dark-brown face and a bright smile.

“Shot. Shot from a French ship’s gun!” the man said as he laughed.

Jonathan could only stare at the hole. As he took in the rest of the sail that was spread about the deck, he noticed four or five more holes of similar size and shape, surrounded by many smaller ones.

“The *Poseidon* is certainly a fighting ship,” he said quietly, and he hurried away.

Finally, Jonathan reached the bow, and there was Steward, holding two buckets and frowning at him. He handed the buckets to Jonathan and scowled.

“Well, well, thanks for joining us,” Steward said with a sarcastic tone. “Mister Moore! Sleep tight, did ya? Comfortable?”

“Why, yes, Steward, I did,” said Jonathan happily. “Thank you for asking! The pleasant rocking of the boat was most enjoyable!”

Steward exploded in anger. “Ya were to wake at eight bells! What are ya, a lobcock?” he bawled. “I swear! Just daft, I tell ya!” He cuffed Jonathan on the back of the head once again. “Yer not on a pleasure cruise, Moore! Yer on one of the king’s fightin’ vessels, His Majesty’s Ship *Poseidon*!”

“Yes, sir,” Jonathan said meekly.

“And don’t call me sir! I am not an officer! Do I look like a prince? Do I wear a blue coat ‘n fancy cap? No!”

Jonathan frowned and apologized again. After a few huffs and puffs, Steward calmed down and mumbled that it was alright since it was Jonathan’s first day aboard.

“Let’s get ya started on yer duties. All the best are gone, so it serves ya right for catching a little extra sleep! Listen! Ya’ ave four tasks. The first, you do first! Ya are to clean the head!”

“The head?” asked Jonathan.

Steward explained that on every ship, there was a wooden sculpture upon the point, called a figurehead. It was carved into the bowsprit, the long wooden pole pointing straight ahead. In the *Poseidon* case, the head was a woman, with blue-and-white splashing waves for hair and a pitchfork-like *Trident* in her arms. Jonathan walked up to the farthest point on the bow to see her, and sure enough, there, some ten feet away over the rushing water, he saw the wooden sculpture.

Jonathan was suddenly afraid.

“I have to clean the head? I am to climb out there and clean her?” he asked in horror. With the rising and falling of the ship and the splashing of the waves across the bow, Jonathan thought he would surely fall into the ocean and be crushed by the speeding *Poseidon*.

“No, no, no!” yelled Steward. “There’s a room down below, right behind ‘er. Right behind ‘er head—and we call it the head. It’s the water closet, the privy, the seat of ease. There’s another one aft by the cap’n’s cabin.”

“Oh,” said Jonathan, relieved.

“That’s yer first task,” Steward said. “Clean all the heads!”

“All right, Steward, er, I mean, aye,” Jonathan said.

“Aye, that’s better. When yer done with the heads, ya water and feed the animals, down below, amidships. That means the middle of the ship, down in the orlop, the lowest level as Sean says.”

“There are animals on the ship?” Jonathan asked, looking around, surprised.

“Besides the crew? Yes,” laughed Steward. “There are four or five goats and a few dozen chickens. No pigs, though—they’s bad luck. It’s a whole little farm down thar, I tell ya. Water and feed ‘em, and then pluck the eggs and return ‘em to my galley, right next to the cap’n’s.”

Jonathan liked animals and had done odd jobs in London caring for horses and the like. So far, all his duties seemed fun.

“What are my other duties?” he asked.

“Yer to be a powder monkey, as we say,” said Steward. “Fer gun crew number seven. That’s yer battle station, ya see? It’s the place ya go when we’re in a fight! Look fer Jenkins, as he is the cap’n of the gun.”

“Captain of the gun?” said Jonathan. “Is he also a captain like Captain Walk—”

“Better think before ya speak, sonny, ‘cause there’s a swat fer yer head working its way over!” warned Steward.

More of this strange sailors’ speak, Jonathan thought. He knew that Jenkins wasn’t a captain in rank. But he was captain of the gun. It was all confusing. Maybe it would be better to just say, “Aye, Steward.”

“Aye, Steward,” he said.

Steward smiled. “A good choice. Now, listen to this. A powder monkey is to retrieve powder for his gun crew and then do whatever else Jenkins commands. Easy as pie.”

“Aye. What else do I do?” asked Jonathan, happy not to have received the annoying slap.

“Yer final duty is to meet in Mister Langley’s wardroom at six bells after noon fer maps and math-a-matics. As ya are to be a midshipman someday, ya will need to use yer brain as well as yer back, d’ya hear? So, after noon, count the bells. At six, be at Mister Langley’s door. Do ya know ‘ow to tell noon on a sailing ship?”

“When the sun is straight up!” announced Jonathan.

“‘Tis true! There’ll be no shadows, right? Well, ya ‘ave a shadow, but yer standing on it!” Steward laughed deeply, so much so that, to Jonathan, it sounded more as if he were about to cough something up.

As Steward opened the door to the head, Jonathan asked about Sean’s whereabouts. Steward laughed again as he explained. It seemed that the swaying of the ship helped Jonathan sleep, but it made poor Sean sick. He had been in the doctor’s cabin since breakfast. Jonathan could see him after his duties were finished.

Steward then showed Jonathan how to clean the head, scooping water from the spray that was always flying over the rail at the bow, and how to use the brushes to scrub down the entire area. Jonathan listened politely, but it became apparent that this was a job that was less than pleasant. Maybe there was a way to trade jobs, he wondered. Anything would be better than this.

“Steward, is there possibly another task that one could do instead of the heads?”

“Glory be!” exploded Steward, shaking his head. “Ya must ‘ave bumped yer head gettin’ out of bed this mornin’!”

Jonathan wondered how Steward could have possibly known that.

“This is not a democracy, Mister Moore!” Steward continued in a rage. “This is a ship in His Majesty’s Navy! And ya do what yer told—with no questions asked! Ya understand?”

Jonathan hung his head, embarrassed. He didn’t mean to upset Steward; he just didn’t know better—not yet.

“Aye, Steward,” he responded meekly.

Steward led him belowdecks, past rooms and doors and down ladders to a dark area in the orlop where the animals were kept. He watered and fed them and cleaned their messes, which was only slightly less discomfoting than cleaning the heads. He collected twelve large white eggs, carefully tucked them in his shirt, and followed Steward to his galley. As small as the cabin he shared with Sean and Claise, Steward’s room was filled with many jars, pots, pans, a stove of sorts, and other items. Still, with only one man occupying the space, it would be slightly roomier than the closet.

## 5

### *The Barker and the Belcher*

The *Poseidon* sailed under blue skies, the breeze was fresh and steady, and the sights and sounds aboard wondrous and also comfoting to Jonathan. He was pleased with having specific assignments and felt he would enjoy all his work with the exception of the cleaning of the heads. Having tasks made him feel as if he belonged to this fine group of men and their magnificent ship—and also that he was free from his troubled past. He was, for all practical purposes, a new man.

Done with his duties, Jonathan walked the upperdeck in search of Steward. He wondered what time it could be and remembered to look down at his shadow. He did. It was gone.

It must be noon! he thought. I am standing on my shadow!

Just then, a bell rang.

“High noon, men! High noon!” Steward yelled. “Cap’n’s gun practice at quarter past, so get to battle stations on the double!”

Lieutenant Langley appeared from below. His walk was one of confidence and purpose as he moved quickly past Jonathan. He announced orders to the men as all turned to pay him the utmost attention.

“Fashion some barrels in the shape of a raft, and send them overboard at my command!” he called to the crew.

“Yes, sir, Mister Langley!” came the answer. A group of men with hammers and nails began lining up barrels and joining them together with planks of wood.

Jonathan watched as the Lieutenant strode toward the stern and climbed the ladder to the quarterdeck. There was Captain Walker in the center, standing as straight as an arrow. Next to him at the wheel was Mister Watt.

Men ran this way and that to their stations and duties. There was little talking, though considerable excitement. As Jonathan stood by, Jenkins appeared, rushing to him with a stern expression.

“Ah, Jenkins,” Jonathan said. “I was just wondering about Mister Watt, there at the wheel, and if he is always—”

Jenkins quickly grabbed Jonathan at the collar, pulling him along the bow.

“Never stand about still, Mister Moore! You’ll be trampled! Follow me to the forward guns and the *Barker*! We are the fourth gun on the starboard side, first one as we go under the fo’c’sle, if you please! You’re with my team! You’re to be powder monkey, aye?”

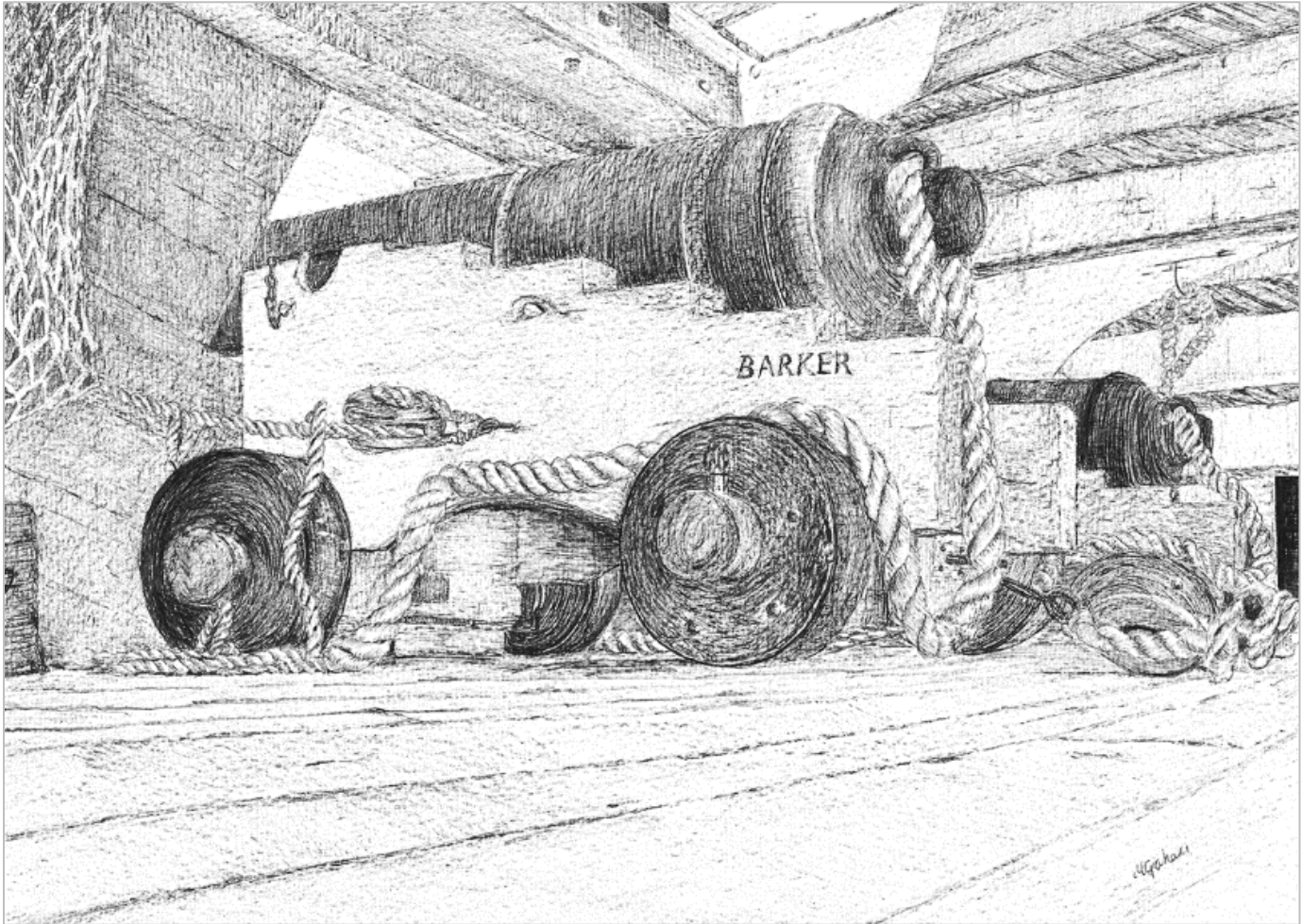
“Aye,” answered Jonathan, and he quickly fell in step with Jenkins. “Steward informed me as of this morning.”

They rushed forward on the upperdeck and soon went under the forecandle, entering a darker room, as it were. Here were more great guns on both sides of the ship, and men busied themselves with the weapons and the ropes, chains, and carriages that held them.

"I am sure," said Jenkins, "that Steward told ya a gundeck is a hazardous place! Keep yer wits about ya now! These iron monsters can damage more than an enemy ship. They can damage you as well. Permanently and forever!"

"Yes, Jenkins," said Jonathan, now a bit apprehensive.

They had stopped at a particular gun, primarily black with shiny brass rings at various points along its eight-foot length. It sat upon a short and sturdy wooden cart with metal wheels at each corner. Jonathan noticed that burned into the wood of the carriage holding the gun was the word *Barker*.



*The Barker, at rest*

"Jenkins, a question?"

"Aye," the man said.

"I would assume the gun will be ignited, and the resulting force would push it backward."

"Smart lad," Jenkins replied. "Aye, it will—and quite quickly. That's why we secure it with a trolley with thick, heavy, breeching rope. See how it runs through these pulleys?"

Jonathan noticed that the rope secured the gun to the deck and also to a nearby beam. It looked sturdy.

Smith and Jones were part of the Barker's eight-man crew and stood on each side of the gun, rocking the weapon back and forth, testing the wheels and their own strength. Another small and wiry man just about Harrison's age jumped up on top of the gun and sat on it, as one would a horse.

"Jenkins!" called Jonathan. "What will that man do atop the gun?"

"That is Garvey," Jenkins said. "He is my eyes, as we say. He opens the gun port, of course, and will call out, 'Fire!' when we are aimed precisely at the barrels! He is small enough to sit in these rafters and has sight keen enough to see across the waves!"

"Nice to meet ya, Mister Moore!" yelled Garvey over the grunts and groans of so many men working, moving the great guns.

“A pleasure, Garvey,” Jonathan said. “Jenkins, what do I do?”

“Ya are our powder monkey, as we say,” said Jenkins. “Run aft to the waist, the center of the gundeck, and take the starboard ladder down to the lowerdeck, then down again to the orlop—”

“That is the lowest level!” said Jonathan.

“Brilliant,” said Jenkins. “Once there, move to the bow. You’ll see a white sheet hangin’. That’s the forward magazine. We call it the powder room, ‘cause it has barrels and barrels of gunpowder. Tobias Johnson is the powderer. He will hand you a cartridge.”

“A cartridge?” asked Jonathan.

“Aye, a flannel bag filled with gunpowder, with a wad on the end—you will see. Put two in this ‘ere pouch,” Jenkins said, handing Jonathan a strapped bag of leather and assisting him in placing it over his shoulder. “Bring it back ‘ere on the double. When done, go down and retrieve two more.”

“Um, Jenkins?” asked Jonathan. “Would you mind giving me the directions again? Please?”

“Just follow the other boys, Jonathan,” Jenkins said with a smile pointing to the other powder monkeys already running aft. “You’ll learn yer way soon! Hurry now!”

Jonathan followed the other boys. As he ran, gun crews on each side of the ship began opening the gun ports, letting in sunbeams that penetrated the dark gunroom and lit his way. Soon he was outside and back in the sunlight. The voice of Lieutenant Langley was heard loud and clear.

“Loose the barrels! Lively now, men. Careful there!” he ordered.

A scraping sound followed as Jonathan watched a raft made of barrels and secured with wooden planks and rope being lifted over the side and then set into the sea.

Jonathan continued on, following the others down the ladder in the center of the gundeck. As careful as he was, he collided with one of his fellow powder monkeys, knocking the boy down.

“My! I am so sorry! Let me help you up!” said Jonathan, concerned that he had angered a fellow mate. However, as the boy turned, Jonathan recognized him and let out a chuckle.

“Jonny Boy!” Sean exclaimed excitedly as he stood and hugged his friend.

“Sean! I heard you were ill. How do you feel now?” Jonathan asked.

“Poorly—but no matter,” Sean said. “In a few moments, the guns will roar, and we will have our hands full! No time to be sick! I am on the *Belcher*, right across from you, I hear.”

“Yes, I am on the *Barker*! Thrilling, isn’t it?”

“Maybe, though maybe not!” Sean said warily. “Just remember, Jonathan, don’t walk or stand behind a gun!”

Jonathan and Sean descended the ladder to the orlop, then down a short flight of stairs where the other boys had stopped, forming a line. Before them was a curtain that acted as a door, except it was dripping with water.

When they reached the front of the line, a hairy arm jutted out from an opening in the center of the curtain, holding what could only be a powder cartridge. They stared at the arm as it waved the flannel sack. Finally, a head popped out. Deep-set eyes in a bearded round face regarded them. The man’s hair was black and thick and curly, and it seemed to continue sprouting from not only his head but also his neck, shoulders, and muscular arms. He looked strong enough to crush both Jonathan and Sean with his little finger if he had a mind to.

“I am Johnson,” he said in a deep voice that sounded as if he gargled gravel. “Ya are powder monkeys?”

“Yes! New to the task,” explained Jonathan.

With all that hair everywhere, Sean reasoned it was *Johnson* who looked like a monkey, but wisely, he said nothing about it.

“What gun are ya on?” asked Johnson.

“The *Barker*!” replied Jonathan.

“The *Belcher*!” said Sean.

“Twenty-fours then,” grunted Johnson. “These will do ya. Take ‘em. An’ keep ‘em straight, keep ‘em dry. Come back fer more.”

The boys carefully handled the powder casings, placing them in their pouches, slinging the pouches over their shoulders, and then swiftly running up the ladders back to their guns.

As they both rejoined their teams, Jonathan saw that Gallotta captained the *Belcher*. He nodded to Jonathan. “Always be a-watching, Mister Moore. We would a-hate to lose you to one of our own a-guns, eh?”

Jonathan nodded back, then he handed both cartridges to Jenkins and turned to retrieve another pair.

“Stop, Moore!” Jenkins said, holding him back. “Only one at a time fer now. Put this one back in yer pouch. We will take a shot first. Stand ‘ere to the side and watch!”

Jonathan waited next to Jenkins for a few moments. Suddenly the ship lurched violently to one side, turning sharply in the water. The *Poseidon* was coming about, heading back to the barrels that Mister Langley had ordered over the side.

“Here we go, boys!” called Jenkins. “Let’s hit a barrel today and taste some extra sweets after dinner tonight!”

“I’d prefer a few anchovies if it were all the same,” said Garvey to Jonathan with a wink and a nod.

Jonathan squinted as he peered out the gun port. From where he stood, he could see the ocean waves moving quickly by as the *Poseidon* raced ahead.

Mister Harrison now appeared on the forward gundeck and ran down the center, checking all the crews with a glance. As he moved quickly toward the bow, he yelled, “Starboard side! You will take the first shot! Make it count!”

“That’s us!” yelled Jenkins to the crew of the *Barker*.

“Fire as she bears!” Harrison yelled.

“That means we fire when our gun is aimed at the barrel-target,” Jenkins told Jonathan.

The powder cartridge and a cotton wad were placed in the open end of the gun by Smith. Jones rammed a long rod down the barrel, pushing both cartridge and wad securely inside. Smith now lifted a heavy iron ball he called “shot” from a nearby wooden box, placed it down the *Barker’s* mouth, and rammed it into place along with another wad.

“Ready!” Smith said.

“Priming!” called Jenkins as he poked a stiff copper wire down a small hole in the top of the gun. Immediately he pulled the wire out and replaced it with a thin roll of dark paper. “This is a quill, Mister Moore. Gunpowder and paper. As a fuse.”

The other men in the crew handled ropes attached to the trolley and pulled them, moving the *Barker* into position, its mouth now extending past the gun port. All guns on the starboard side did the same.

“Steady!” Harrison called, and all went silent in the gun room. No one moved. No one spoke.

Jenkins lit a small hand torch about the size of a candle, holding it away from the gun. Jonathan noticed the other gun captains did the same.

The ship continued onward.

Jonathan could see that all the guns on the starboard side were ready to fire, just like the *Barker*. Each gun captain leaned over the weapon, looking along its length out the port. After what seemed an eternity, the captain on the first starboard gun called out, “Fire!”

His gun exploded in a crash of flame and thunder. Jonathan jumped up in fright.

“Fire! Fire!” was called rapidly, and guns were lit, exploding in violent flashes and commotion. They kicked back at an alarming speed, straining the breeching ropes that held the fiery monsters at bay.

“Fire!” yelled Garvey, and Jenkins touched his torch to the *Barker*. It erupted so loudly that Jonathan’s ears began to ring immediately. Flames shot out of the end of the great gun, and it madly jumped backward.

“Fire! Fire! Fire! Fire! Fire!” was called as the remaining starboard guns flew backward, sending their shot rocketing into the air toward the barrels. The sound was deafening, and when it ceased, thick gray smoke filled the gundeck.

After each gun was rolled back into its resting position, the men ran to the ports to see if they had hit their mark. Jonathan ran as well and stood next to Jenkins as they peered across the waves. He could not imagine the barrels withstanding all the guns of the *Poseidon*.

His eyes searched carefully from side to side. After a moment, he saw the barrel-raft floating in the dark-blue water, just a short distance away. Attached to it was a pole sticking straight up like a mast, with a small red flag tied to the top, waving in the wind. As it bobbed up and down in the waves, Jonathan believed the raft seemed, well, happy.

“We missed!” he called out.

“Aye,” said Jenkins angrily, “we can see that!”

From up above, Mister Langley yelled, “Coming about!”

Jenkins instructed Jonathan to retrieve two more cartridges and be careful of the guns on the other side of the ship. It was now the port side’s turn to blast at the barrels. Jonathan wished Sean good luck and headed back to Mister Johnson. In a small way, he actually hoped that Sean and the entire port side would miss so he and his gun crew would have another chance to fire the *Barker*.

After retrieving his cartridges, Jonathan began making his way back to the *Barker*. The *Poseidon* came about, and the same scene replayed from the port side, with all the gun captains yelling, “Fire! Fire!” as the barrels came into view. Flame, thunder, and smoke filled all of Jonathan’s senses as he ran back to Jenkins with his cartridge. He was almost to the *Barker*. There was Mister Harrison walking ahead of each gun, checking the crews before they fired, and slapping the men on their backs just moments before the guns were lit.

Suddenly, as Jonathan approached, Harrison spun his head around and looked directly at him. He yelled, “Jonathan!” and something else, but Jonathan could not hear what he was saying. The noise was too great. Gallotta was now moving his torch to ignite the *Belcher*. It was then that Jonathan realized he was standing directly behind the gun. He looked up, expecting to see the gun roar back and end his life, but instead, he saw Harrison flying through the air. Gallotta moved the torch to within an inch of the gun, but Harrison’s hand reached out and knocked the torch to the deck. Continuing on, Harrison slammed into Jonathan, knocking him down. He quickly grabbed the boy and rolled toward the stern. The next gun in line fired, recoiling back with massive force, the wheels of the gun just missing Jonathan’s leg as it slammed



backward.

The remaining guns on the port side exploded in quick succession. BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Then there was silence, except for the ringing in Jonathan's ears. Shocked, he peered through the smoke and soon could make out Mister Harrison lying next to him. Jonathan coughed and shook his head, trying to stand, but his hip seemed to be aching. Harrison was helped up by Jenkins and others. Worried men inspected them from all angles and asked, "Are ya whole?" and "Are ya hurt anywhere?"

As Jonathan stood slowly, Mister Harrison looked hard at him, shaking his head in disapproval.

"I will be seeing the captain!" Harrison announced as he stood, "and I advise you all to say that I signaled Gallotta to hold fire, and it was my mistake. Is that clear?"

All the men sadly agreed, saying, "Aye" and "Yes, sir" in a quiet chorus.

Harrison brushed himself off and then walked away quickly, out into the sunlight.

One by one, every man glanced at Jonathan and frowned. A few men murmured, "Almost got them both killed," and others said, "Didn't he know not to stand behind a gun?" Soon, the men slowly went back to their work.

"Where is Mister Harrison going?" Jonathan asked, to no one in particular.

"Every gun must fire," Jenkins said solemnly. "Every last one or the cap'n gets sore and surly, I can tell ya. And Mister Harrison is in a mind to tell the cap'n that he made a mistake; that he told Gallotta not to fire."

"But he saved me! Probably my life! Why doesn't he tell the captain the truth—that it was my fault?" Jonathan said, worried that Harrison would get another tongue-lashing.

Jenkins and the others shook their heads.

"Someone will be punished," said Smith, "and Mister Harrison will take his knocks instead of it being you! He's a good man, that Harrison!"

"Then I will tell the captain it was my fault!" Jonathan cried.

"Then it will be you that gets punished," said Jenkins.

Jonathan nodded and said, "I can take it! How bad could it be?"

"Very bad, Mister Moore," Jenkins said. "Aye, very bad!"

"It doesn't often 'appen on this ship," Smith said, almost in tears, "but ordinary crewmen can get lashes. Whipped. Chained to the mast. Most terrible. Let us all pray that the cap'n shows leniency!"