

encouragement into my ear. He told me that I knew all I had to do, because we had practised it previously, reminding me how we had gone about our own barrack square, relieving imaginary guards and visiting fancy sentries; then he explained everything minutely, informed me that I could not make a mistake, it was all so very simple, but damped this encouraging assurance with the reminder that the general was very particular, and that any blunder of mine would be a disgrace to the regiment, and so we arrived at the parade. There stood the different guards in a long red line; there were the colours, and the band, and the brigade major; and there, in the distance, overwatching the proceedings like a grim Jupiter, the awful general, and there, too, were a select body of ladies, nursery-maids, and children, who had turned out thus early to see the show, which was pretty enough to those who were not actors therein, or who, being such actors, knew their parts, and had not sick headaches. I fell in, and the band played, and the colours were paraded up and down, and I got along pretty well until we arrived at a part of the performance where the officers had to march right across the square, in slow time, to their respective guards. Now, I can keep step very well when in the ranks, because I move my legs when the others do, but my bump of time is, or ought to be, a dead-level; and stepping with the band, now that I was all alone, was to me as physically impossible as waltzing had always been, so that whenever I glanced at the officer of the adjoining guard I found I was out of step, and changed feet, and as this happened pretty often, my progress became one continuous *chasse*, which gave me an air of dancing across the parade. But this was not all: my head was in such a whirl that I could not march straight to my front, so that when at last I reached the red line before me, I found that I had some how edged off to the wrong guard, and the howls of the Brigade-Major, while I was running about, trying to find my place, were something frightful to listen to.

At last the trooping was over, and as all the guards marched off, I felt happier; nobody could bully or interfere with me now, for I was in command; and as we tramped through the streets, I felt at least two inches taller, especially on passing a bow-window where three of the lowest—

"Howl-llt!" roared a voice of thunder, which brought us up as sharp as if an iron wall had sprung up before us.

I jumped so that I dropped my sword.

When I had picked it up, I discovered that an individual with red face and grey whiskers, dressed in uniform, with a cocked hat and a brass scabbard, and mounted on a powerful big-boned horse, was louting at me.

"Way the orcus did you not carry arms to me, sir-r-r? eh?"

It is impossible to convey any idea of the accent he gave to that "eh?" I nearly dropped my sword again.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said I; "I did not see—"

"Then you ought to have seen, sir," he barked, and digging his spurs into his horse, vanished like a flash of lightning. Who he was, what his rank, or whence he came, I know not, neither do I care. But a glance at the bow-window showed me that my discomfiture had proved a source of mirth to the occupants thereof, and I felt bitterly towards the individual with the grey whiskers and powerful voice. As I could not sink into the earth, a course I should certainly have preferred to adopt, there was nothing for it but to march on, and in

due time we reached the gates of the Lockman Dock, through which we stopped in slow time, with carried arms, the adjutant's directions coming into my head one by one as I wanted them. The guard-room was situated on the right, inside the gates, and the old guard was posted at open order in front of it. I knew that the new guard must be drawn up facing them, so I led my men solemnly on.

"To the right, form, sir!" cried the sergeant in a loud whisper, but did not catch his meaning, and so thought it simpler to go on a little further.

"Halt—front!" cried I and they halted and fronted, but, alas, their *backs* were turned to the old guard, in whose ranks I think, I heard an insubordinate giggle.

However, I counter-marched my men, and then the old guard presented arms to us, and we presented arms to the old guard, and some of the new guard were marched off to relieve the sentries, and I apologized to the old guard officer, a youth of eighteen, who graciously patronized me, and told me that I should do better another time. He also kindly gave me a tip for the Cambridge-shire Stakes, and imparted other valuable information, until, all his sentries being gathered in, he marched his party off, and behind him were closed and barred those gates beyond which it was unlawful for me to pass for twenty-four hours.

As a general rule, the fact of being confined in any particular place, however pleasant, would make me long to get out of it, but at present I had no such wish, for the novelty of the position had a romantic charm about it which quite reconciled me to the imprisonment. Twenty-two marines, some of them bronzed and decorated men, who had braved for several years the battle and the breeze, were under *my* command; and it was my first taste of power, for being a quiet man and a hen-pecked, it had never occurred to me to exercise authority at home. Then I was in a responsible position; no one could come into the dock yard without my permission, and if he insisted on forcing his way by climbing over the wall or otherwise, I might—might I order him to be bayoneted? Yes, I might certainly do so, and the sentry would probably obey me; but should I be hung for giving such an order?

This being a point worthy of serious consideration, I took the board of orders down from the mantelpiece, and seating myself on a truckle bed, which, with a table, two chairs, an inkstand, a pen, a grate, a coal scuttle, and broken poker, formed the furniture of the guard-room, commenced an investigation of the duties of my position, which led to a further reverie upon my present dignity, and the magnitude of the interests committed to my charge; one of them being a powder-magazine of so ticklish a constitution that the smoking of a pipe in the guard-room, a quarter of a mile off, could not be indulged in without running the risk of blowing up half the town, with a fair proportion of those gun-boats and frigates for which we pay such a tidy little bill every year; and the idea of the bare possibility of the taxes of the country being increased by any such negligence of mine made me shudder. While cogitating in this way, I began to experience certain uneasy sensations in the region of the stomach, which by and by resolved themselves into a yearning for tea, and bread and butter, and in due time it occurred to me that I had not breakfasted. What was to be done? I had not seen my servant before leaving the barrack square, and as I had selected the lad for his honesty rather than

his intelligence, I knew he would never come to look after me without express orders to that effect. I must have patience; but yet, what was the use of that? Patience is a very good thing for the toothache, because one lives in hopes of its going off; but hunger never "goes off."

Well, well, it was no great hardship after all to go without breakfast for once. The worst of it was that the difficulty would recur at dinner time.

These dismal reflections were broken in upon by the sergeant, who appeared at the doorway and asked if I would choose to see the sentries, which I forthwith began to do, and as I varied the amusement by investigations of all the objects of interest in the place, it took me a couple of hours to go the rounds. First of all, I came to a large building where boiler plates were being drilled round the edges with small holes for the rivets, and I stood for a long time watching the punch pressing out the little circular bits of iron with that ease and neatness peculiar to the irresistible power of steam, till a workman of whom I asked some question remarked that "one would think it was going into so much cheese," and the mention of that comestible was too much for a tamed Welshman. Not far from this workshop, I came upon my first sentry, who ported arms and proceeded to repeat his orders, which were printed up in his sentry box. There were under his care a crowbar, which he was to give up when requested to the dockyard police, and a life buoy, which he was to throw to any one whom he saw struggling in the water. He was also to challenge any one who approached his post after dark; to fire off a blank cartridge in case of fire, and above all, to allow no one to smoke either on the wharf or on board the shipping moored off it. All this he repeated in a breath, like a child saying the catechism; and I passed on, and spent half an hour in watching the prodigies performed by a Vulcan hammer, though, if Vulcan can hit half as hard as that, I pity poor Venus when he comes home jealous and nectary. Then came an interview with another sentry; then I watched the process of razeing a three-decker that would not sail into a frigate that would; after which came more sentries, all of whom told their little tale so exactly in the same way that I grew weary, and determined to dodge the next. This was a tall, sturdy, red faced lad, evidently not long from the plough, who, when I came upon him round a corner, was standing gazing into his sentry box, reading the orders there printed up, evidently cramming for his approaching examination. On hearing my footsteps, he faced about and ported his arms.

"Do you know your orders?" said I.

"Eesir," he replied.

"Well, then, if a man fell off that vessel into the water, and you saw that he was drowning, what would you do?"

Poor fellow! I never saw more utter and hopeless bewilderment expressed on mortal face. I repeated the question in as clear and simple a way as I could.

"Give 'un the crowbar!" he at length replied.

I tried to explain the inutility of a crowbar to a drowning man.

"Fire a blank cartridge at 'un!" was his second guess, and I gave him up in despair.

Only after that, I did not walk so close to the edge of the quay as I had been previously doing.

At some little distance from the workshops and dry docks, but close to the water-edge, stood a square, low, windowless stone building, encompassed on the land side by