

*A Detective in the Bud*

by Thomas Waters

IT may sound strangely, but is not the less true, that I joined the Metropolitan Detective Police Force—only the name of which is modern, the vocation itself being as old as corrupt, civilized and uncivilized humanity—before I had obtained the ripe age of sixteen. My stepfather, at that time a well-known Bow-street officer—Bow-street Runner was the more common appellation—iron-willed, but just man, believed implicitly in the wisdom of Solomon, especially in the part thereof which teaches that to spare the rod is to spoil the child. He exemplified the sincerity of his faith by vigorous practice, and never more strikingly than shortly before my sixteenth birthday, when it became necessary to peremptorily decide upon the groove into which, as we would now say, I should be shunted to make the journey of life. I, myself had a strong predilection for the sea, and advanced reasons eminently satisfactory to myself why I should be at once bound ‘prentice to Andrew Giles, skipper of a Newcastle collier trading between that port and the Thames, and a distant relative of my mother, long before that departed. My stepfather’s views entirely differed from mine; I was more fitted to be a sweep than a sailor; but having noticed certain peculiarities of mine—indications of a character which in itself was not worthy of commendation, but might be turned to useful account in the business of life—he had determined upon training me in the way I should go, whether I liked it or not, which way was the career of a Bow-street Detective Officer, his own profession.

The proposal disgusted me. I told him so. Whereupon he at once had recourse to his favorite argument, the cane. Less than one week’s daily drill in that exercise more than sufficed to convince me that he was right, I wrong; and with the consent of Sir Richard Burnie, I was given what may be called a cadet’s commission in the celebrated corps of Bow-street “Runners,” the pay to commence with twenty pounds per annum.

The Year was 1819—that of the Peterloo Manchester Massacre, as the charge of the valiant yeomanry upon Orator Hunt’s unarmed half-starved ragamuffins was termed by irreverent scribblers and spouters in Parliament and the press. Sir Francis Burdett, Baronet, “Westminster’s Pride and England’s Glory” (abbreviated by William Cobbett, that sledge-hammer assailant of all rival celebrities, into “Sir Glory”) as his admirers called him—wrote his once celebrated, long since forgotten letter upon that occasion;—winged words of burning eloquence, which kindled in me—silly, excitable mooncalf—and in thousands of others, a fiery indignation against the Sidmouth-Castlereagh Ministry, and, a much more serious matter, consigned Westminster’s Pride and England’s Glory to the Tower, by order of the Honorable the House of Commons, upon whom and by whom the letter was declared to be a scandalous libel. Sir Francis refusing to surrender, was captured by force, and conveyed, escorted by the Life Guards, to the tower. The people resisted; a gunsmith’s shop on Snow-hill was broken into, pillaged, and enough was done in the way of puny revolt to legally justify the soldiers in firing upon the infuriated mob. Two or three persons were killed, more wounded, and the incidents of the day furnished employment for many weeks afterwards to the Bow-street Detective Police, in the endeavor to hunt down a number of ringleaders in the riot, for whose apprehension large rewards were offered by the Government. Amongst these was John Watson, upon whose track, he happening to be personally

known to me, I, with others, was hounded on; a mission most repugnant to my feelings, for I greatly respected, I may say loved, the fugitive—an element of the case unguessed at by my father.

This was my first essay in the Detective line of business. Forty-four years have passed away since then—crowded years, full of adventure, peril, excitement—more especially since the two Forresters retired from active service, and I, with others, entered upon their peculiar functions, which chiefly consisted in tracking fugitives from justice on the Continent of Europe, in the United States, Canada, Australia, &c. Curious enough, my last detective exploit resembled my first in this, that it was a hunt after a man named Watson—Richard, however, not John Watson—who led me a pretty dance, concluded at the Mauritius, and at the same time finishing me forever as a Detective.

Returned to England a helpless cripple—so far as active bodily exertion is concerned, a few months since superannuated upon a fairly-liberal pension—it has occurred to me that I might improve my income, and at the same time amuse, if not instruct, that portion of the public who prefer facts, to fiction however airily tricked out, by transcribing from the tablet of memory the most striking of the scenes which gleam through the dimming mists of those four-and-forty years, commencing with the chase after John Watson the Radical rebel, ending with the pursuit of Richard Watson the fraudulent stock-broker. These ought to make an entertaining book; and will, if I can only find the true trick of writing it.

I have remarked that John Watson was personally known to and much liked by me, and that my stepfather knew nothing of the latter circumstance. My acquaintance with Watson commenced in a singular manner. My mother—a weak-spirited, gentle creature, in marrying a second time, when I was in my third year, had given herself a master as well as a husband. I doubt that she was ever violently attached to him. Well, I have *no* doubt whatever upon the subject, though her sad, solemn eyes, full of yearning love for *me*, closed upon the world when I was but eight years of age. I also know she was as true a wife as loving mother. There was a brother of hers—Robert Smith, suppose we call him—a wild, reckless man, who having wasted in early life the means, both material and moral, which might have enabled him to attain a respectable social position, had gradually sunk into the lowest depths of degradation. My stepfather, in the first blush of his marriage (he must have loved his wife had he been composed throughout of hardest flint), made several efforts to reclaim, to save him. Irritated, angered by the failure of his well-meant efforts, he not only himself whistled off the irreclaimable vagabond, but sternly commanded my mother to do the same. She was forbidden to hold the slightest intercourse with him, and enjoined, should he persist in coming to the house, pestering her for the loan of small sums of money, as he had been in the habit of doing, to at once give him into custody. The ties of blood, intertwined, knotted in childhood, are difficult, in some natures, impossible to break. My mother *could* not break so entirely with Robert Smith as her husband wished; but she scrupulously avoided assisting the ne'er-do-well at that husband's cost. Some of her relatives, Lancashire folks, were in fair circumstances, and to them she appealed for at least sufficient money to help to save the miserable castaway from absolute starvation—possibly from suicide. That help was afforded; but what could such doles avail in satisfying the cravings of a confirmed drunkard? Smith grew more and more importunate, forever threatening to hang or drown himself; and at

length so worked upon his sister's feelings that she consented to see him personally, as soon as it should be dark (the month was November), in Copenhagen Fields—a locality named by himself.

I was then about eight years of age, and my mother took me with her. She usually wore a rather costly gold watch and chain—a present of my stepfather's on the wedding day. In her flurry at setting out to keep the clandestine appointment very reluctantly made, she forgot to put off those trinkets; an oversight which might have had disastrous consequences.

The night fell dark, gusty, and a chilling, drizzly rain set in before we reached the place of meeting—then one of the dreariest spots in London. Smith, more than half-drunk, was waiting for us with savage impatience—we being considerably behind the time agreed upon. His sister had but a half-guinea for him; he clutched it with a snappish growl at the smallness of the gift, then asked if his sister could suppose that such a sum could afford him real relief; help him to leave this cursed country for America, as his last letter informed her he intended doing; or, should he find it “impossible to carry out that purpose, take his departure, without further shilly-shallying, and by swifter conveyance, to another place—that place, hell!—hell! One may be pretty sure of that, eh Madam Piety? And you—you” he added, with gathering ferocity, “you, my sister, who could, who can save me from destruction, will not! I want but ten guineas—only ten guineas—possessed of which, I will leave England forever before the week is out!”

Smith's melodramatic mouthing did not even impose upon me, child as I was; but I noticed with a vague feeling of uneasiness (the moon was just then shedding a pale, uncertain light through a rift in the dense night clouds) that his blood-shot, greedy eyes were fixed upon the watch and chain. My mother, observing that she could as easily give him one hundred guineas as ten, turned away, with a gesture of impatient disgust. As she did so, the brother, maddened with drink and disappointment, made a fierce snatch at the watch. To have permitted herself to be despoiled of it by Smith would have entailed her husband's lasting displeasure, and she screamed loudly, struggled desperately to retain it. I helped her by kicking the drunken ruffian's legs, biting his hands with all the strength I could bring to the rescue. Smith, who must have been a very powerful man before the Delilah of drink had shorn him a great portion of his strength, would no doubt have finally prevailed had not effectual help come, and not one moment too soon. Smith was struck to the ground by the blow of a brawny fist, and the glittering prize of which he deemed himself secure was wrested from his grasp. The person who arrived so opportunely to our aid was Mr. John Watson, who, it subsequently appeared, was acquainted, in consequence, I suppose, of similarity of political crotchets, with Smith. A hurried, passionate explanation followed the defeated felonious attempt of Smith, and first administering a stern warning, Mr. Watson allowed him to depart. Mr. Watson accompanied us for the greater part of our way homeward, conversing earnestly the while with my mother concerning Robert Smith, in whom, for some reason or other, he evidently felt a deep interest. Confidential communications between my mother and Watson, of which I was the medium, took place during the next five or six weeks; and the gratifying result was that Robert Smith was enabled to leave his country for his country's good, with a fair prospect of mending his ragged fortunes in one of the newly-settled Western States of America. I often afterwards casually met and exchanged friendly greetings with Watson, and never for one moment forgot that my mother, to her dying day, felt both esteem and gratitude.

It was this man whose lurking-place the Government of the day was so anxious to discover. Once unearthed, caught in the iron grip of the Bow-street Runners, Watson would be as surely hanged as that all of us must one day meet Death in that or some other form. And this was to be the first essay of my 'prentice hand in the repulsive vocation which I had been scourged into embracing, was it? I was to do my best, poor as that best might be, to bring to the gallows one of the very few persons who had ever done a real kindness to me or mine. I might perhaps have felt bound to do such violence to my young, fresh sense of honor and humanity if, instead of having been brutally coerced, I had volunteered into the service. But that not being the case, we should see that which we should see.

The chase was hot and close after poor Watson. It was soon pretty certain that he was concealed somewhere in Loudon, but to make assurance doubly sure, not a vessel could be cleared from a British port till it had been ransacked from stem to stern, in search of the fugitive. Not one of the hunters was more eager, more vigilant than myself. My acquaintance with Watson, comparatively slight as it had been, gave me peculiar facilities which I turned to such good account that but a few days passed before I knew that Watson, alias Kirby, was concealed at No. 46, John-street, Clerkenwell. I had been aware of that fact two or three days when a note written in a disguised hand by a partially trusted traitor was received by our chief officer, stating that Watson was to be found in John-street, Clerkenwell. The number of the house, the writer thought, was 73 or 93; but if mistaken in that respect the right number would be certainly forwarded before many hours, perhaps one hour, had passed, by "Thomas Jebb, a needy but loyal subject of his Majesty King George."

The letter, which reached the office about noon, having been read and a consultation held thereon, it was determined, till the exact information promised came to hand, to merely watch Nos. 73 and 93, John-street, and not run the risk of warning the quarry that the hunters had struck the true trail, and would soon pounce upon their prey if speedy flight were not resorted to.

My mind—the mind of a rash, foolish, most imprudent boy—was instantly made up, and off I started for 46 John-street, rung the side bell, told the scared serving-wench who opened the door that I must see Mr. Kirby at once, bolted past her without waiting for an answer, ran up to the first floor three steps at a time, and the next minute was face to face with John Watson, who sprung up from his chair with panic alarm, let fall his pipe and seized the poker. He was tolerably disguised by means of a flaxen wig, but would scarcely pass undetected by any one who knew and was looking for him.

"You, Clarke!" he exclaimed with quivering voice, and a sternly reproachful glance, "You—"

"Yes, me," I broke in; "me, Henry Clarke, who is here, and not one moment too soon, to save you if possible from the officer whose net is fast closing round you, Mr. Watson. You must leave this immediately, and as much better disguised than you are now as we can manage in the few minutes we have to spare."

Watson was a man of nerve, but so imminent and deadly a peril deprived him for the moment of all presence of mind. He trembled violently, and was so completely helpless that the additional disguise required, I was compelled to invent and adjust myself.

That done tolerably to my satisfaction, I urged him to secure any money or papers he might have, of importance. He did so with my help. I was pleased to find that he felt not the slightest distrust of me. It was not likely that he would. The tones of simple honesty and truth are rarely misinterpreted.

“Now, my good sir, follow the guidance of a boy, and boldly. We must let ourselves out one at a time, myself keeping a few paces ahead. The servant girl, I am sure, does not know who I am, and I took the precaution to prevent her obtaining more than a very slight glance at my phiz. Come along, Mr. Watson, my mother’s friend. There is no fear.”

No fear! The chances were in favor of both of us being caught as we left the house, in which case, as I soon afterwards bethought me with a shudder, I could only have saved myself from the capital charge of misprision of treason by the pretence, which, with Watson’s connivance, would hardly have passed, that I had by the prowess of my boy-arm arrested Watson, and was holding him in custody. In fact, I subsequently ascertained that three officers dispatched to John-street soon after I left Bow-street office must have passed No. 46 but a few minutes before Watson and I quitted it.

My next move was yet more rash and audacious, but yet not without a spice of cleverness by force of its very rashness and audacity. At that hour of the day there would not be a soul at home in the house where I and my stepfather lodged, and there was a bedroom rarely used in which I determined to secrete Watson till some final scheme of escape could be devised. The fugitive himself was startled when he found where he was to be temporarily stowed away. A few moments’ reflection quieted his fears. Surely the very last place in which the officers would expect to find Watson would be the domicile of one of themselves!

One element of danger had been overlooked, was indeed unsuspected by me. Watson had caught a cold, could not for the life of him avoid coughing violently now and then, and my father’s bedroom was only divided from his by a thin wooden partition. This awful fix suddenly making itself known to me as, very late in the evening, I returned home with provisions for my protégé, positively threw me into a bath of cold perspiration. Why, Good Heavens! my father’s step might at any moment be heard on the stairs; in which case our terrible wager, life against death, would be lost to all intents and purposes. A council of despair, or at least one approaching to that color, resulted in the pleasant conclusion that nothing better at that time of night could be done than the procurement of a plentiful supply of cough lozenges. This was done, we bade each other an apprehensive farewell, and nervously thought of the morrow.

It seemed almost a special Providence that my stepfather did not return home that night. The informer upon Watson had written again, giving the correct number of the house, No. 46 John-street; but too late,—the bird had flown. It had suddenly crossed my mind when we left the place, seeing the serving wench listening and cock-watching out of a partially opened door, to say in an affected whisper, quite loud enough to be heard, “If we can only get safe to Deal or Ramsgate, the trick is done.” Very lucky that thought did cross my mind, as the girl, bullied and bribed into telling all she knew, and probably something more, repeated what I said, and, of course, to exalt her own wonderful acuteness of ear, dwelt upon the cautious, whispering way in

which it was said. Presto! Officers, my stepfather amongst them, set off, post-haste for Deal and Ramsgate, and did not return till full forty-eight hours afterwards. Before that time expired, we (Watson and Company) had made a new, and to the adversary we flattered ourselves, rather perplexing move in the game.

The night passed in fear and trembling. I—first locking up poor hunted Watson in a narrow coal-cupboard—hastened to Bow-street, where I learnt the foregoing particulars. Gratefully recognizing the beneficent Providence which had so far steered our frail bark in safety through sinuous shoals and quicksands, I, nevertheless, being instinctively a believer in the soundness of the axiom that “Heaven helps those who help themselves,” cast about with eager solicitude to discover some particular mode of achieving permanent success. My pride, of which I had a Luciferian share, was aroused. It was a duel—nothing less—between me and the famous Bow-street runners. Should I succeed—should I baffle those trained sleuthhounds—it would prove, at all events, that my astute stepfather had rightly divined the peculiar bent of my genius.

The dodge to which John Watson owed his ultimate safety has always been attributed to his own vulpine cunning—to his own calculated audacity. He himself so gave it out at a meeting in New York. That was not true. Either he was misreported or he misrepresented the facts of the case, which were these:—

The next house to the Bow-street Police-office was occupied by a tailor of the name of Savill. He appeared to have a quiet sort of family trade, and the upper part of his house was let off in “Furnished Apartments for Single Gentlemen.” I did not remember to have ever seen his front window divested of that announcement; but the familiar formula had never spoken suggestively to me till three or four hours after I had left poor Watson locked up in the coal-cupboard. “Furnished Apartments for Single Gentlemen” in immediate proximity to the renowned police-office. The words seemed to read themselves to me, as my eyes rested half-vacantly upon them, with a knavish chuckle and slightly altered— “A Furnished Apartment for a Single Gentleman!”

To be sure, the very thing for William Stubbs, alias Richard Kirby, alias John Watson. No man with his wits about him would, if he happened to be particularly “wanted” in Bow-street, walk of his own accord to Bow-street, and take up his abode under the very noses of the men in quest of him! Certainly not. It were an unimaginable absurdity. Just so; and for that reason an old schoolfellow and fast friend of mine walked before noon on that day into Savill’s shop, saw that respectable individual, and engaged his three-pair-back bedroom for an uncle—Mr. William Stubbs—a quiet countryman from Norfolk, who would give no trouble whatever, but required to be boarded as well as lodged. There was no objection, my friend added, to a monthly payment in advance. Such an offer accepted itself; references were superfluous; Mr. William Stubbs could come direct from the Saracen’s Head, Skinner-street, when the Norwich coach arrived, and would find the apartments ready, the sheets well aired, and a dinner ready to be served, &c. &c.

Looking down from the height of forty-five years of detective experience, I must say that was not a common device to be hatched and matured in a boy’s unpracticed brain, and can to this day heartily participate the delicious but of course subdued merriment with which my ante-self, at sixteen, looked on whilst the stout Stubbs slowly alighted from a hackney-coach, and, with his luggage, leisurely passed before the unregardful eyes of the Bow-street officials into Mr. Savill’s

house. The worthy tailor and I have chuckled over, and drained glasses whilst chuckling over, that neat trick a hundred times.

John Watson remained about seven weeks at Savill's, during which his capture was twenty times at least reported in the newspapers. By then, vigilance, enfeebled by disappointment, had become dull, torpid, and it was judged by Watson's friends, with whom I was in secret communication, that he should no longer delay his departure for America.

As I was informed, the final arrangement come to was that Watson should embark at London. This was in accordance with my theory, that the place where it was least likely you would be sought for was that where, if sought for, you would be most easily found. I bade Watson adieu, and gaily wished him "bon voyage." He expressed grateful thanks for the great service I had rendered him; and yet, with a strange mistrust of one who had given such unmistakable proof of his good faith, tacitly deceived me as to the port where he purposed embarking for the States. In so doing, he, I must believe, acted by the advice of others, not by the promptings of his own mind.

The very next day a letter was received from that "needy but loyal subject of King George, Thomas Jebb," informing the authorities that the proclaimed traitor John Watson intended to embark at Liverpool, in the liner *Washington*, which was advertised to sail on the 10th instant—four days from then. I had never been able to discover who "the needy and loyal subject" was—his real name being only communicated in confidence to the Solicitor of the Treasury; and this note completely demolished a vague suspicion which had lately arisen in my mind, pointing to a very intimate acquaintance of a friend of Watson as the traitor. I must have been mistaken, it being quite clear that Thomas Jebb only knew that Watson was about to attempt leaving the country, but not from which port. By the way, I had made it a peremptory condition with the hunted man that he should on no account confide the secret of his hiding place to any human being, except Mr. Grafton, a watchmaker, in Hatton-garden, a near relative of his, in whose good faith and discretion I had implicit confidence.

It was at once determined that two officers should proceed to Liverpool, and search the *Washington* when well out at sea, just previous to the pilot leaving her. My stepfather was one of the selected officers, and he being in a remarkably gracious mood, the arrest of Watson appearing to be at last assured, consented that I should accompany him. I felt a malicious pleasure in the anticipation of being a witness to the blank disappointment of the "Runners" when they found that Watson was *not* on board the *Washington*—a pleasure that would be greatly enhanced by the certainty of the fugitive's escape which would be then simmering at my heart—the London liner, in which he would have embarked, sailing on the same day as the *Washington*.

We kept strictly on the quiet in Liverpool, making no inquiries whatever, but keenly observant of the *Washington*. Ten minutes after the Blue Peter flew out at her mast-head we were dropping down the Mersey in a stout six-oared boat, which could not fail easily to overhaul the liner unless a stiff breeze sprang up, which was not, the sailors said, in the least likely, even should the American captain disregard, as had more than once happened, the signal, to be displayed at the proper moment, of "Officers coming to visit and search the *Washington*."

Our boat had not long cleared the Mersey when we sighted another, pulled by two oars only, with one passenger sitting at the stern. The captain of our skiff, after a hasty look through his glass, said, "That boat is waiting for the *Washington*, and it'll very likely the stout individual in the stern-sheets is your man, gentlemen. But if so, you will find him on board the liner. By jingo! I'm not so sure of that," added the seaman, again bringing his glass to bear upon the boat. "They don't like our looks, and are pulling like grim death back to shore. Shall we give chase? There will be plenty of time, after picking her up, to overhaul the *Washington*."

Chase was given; the man in the strange boat strained every muscle to escape, in compliance—we could presently see, by the wild, frenzied gestures of their passenger—with his entreaties, backed no doubt by lavish promises of reward in the event of success. But the two-oared boat had not the ghost of a chance of reaching the shore before we should be alongside, and a sickening flush ran through my veins as the thought arose in my mind, that it was just possible a change in the plan of escape had taken place at the last moment, and that the frantic passenger was John Watson.

All doubt was soon over. We ran alongside the chase; the two officers stepped from our boat to the other; the passenger's wig was snatched off, his false whiskers ditto, and then revealed before us, in dumb terror, was—not John Watson—but the cashier of an eminent London firm, who had absconded with a considerable sum of money, and for whose apprehension a reward of one hundred pounds had been for some considerable time vainly offered. "Mr. Charles Thurston, as I'm alive," gleefully shouted my stepfather. "We are in luck today, and have a good chance of killing two gallows-birds with one stone. Now then," he added, collaring the swooning cashier, and forcing him into our boat. "Now then, we've no time to spare, and it's of no use to snivel or faint. Bring away his traps. All right. And now, captain, pull like good men for the *Washington*, which I see is running out to sea at a spanking rate."

"Yes," said our captain, "the breeze is rising faster than I expected it would. We had better step the mast, and run up signals at once." This was done, our fellows at the same time bending to the oars with a will. For some time it was doubtful that we were seen, or, if seen, that our signal should be heeded. If that should prove so, the capture of Thurston would have ensured the escape of Watson, it being clearly impossible for us to cut off or overtake the liner, which was dashing on under a cloud of canvas. The two "Runners" were dreadfully put out, swore roundly at poor Thurston for coming in their way just at the wrong moment, and soundly rated the captain of the skiff for assuring them the small boat might be overhauled without fear of thereby missing the *Washington*.

"It was a fair calculation," said the man, "that we might; and this fellow moaning and twisting here in the bottom of the boat must have been the man you particularly wanted. All right," he added, "all right: the liner is shivering her foresail; round she comes, and will lie-to for us."

The American skipper received us with a cold, grim civility. The surrender to officers of justice of any criminal who had once set his foot on the deck of a ship sailing under the star-spangled banner was very distasteful to those "Hail Columbia!" gentlemen, even when that ship was in British waters; and but for the penalties which would be incurred, and enforced whenever the



Yankee ship whose commander had willfully refused to lie-to when properly signalled to do so, returned to a British port—they would have never, or at all events very seldom, given up any man, except it may be an atrocious murderer.

The *Washington* carried out two hundred and seventy-five passengers. It was necessary to inspect every one of these, and afterwards search the ship, if our man were not previously found. The detention of the liner would consequently last a considerable time; and as there was a fresh and rising easterly breeze, the chagrin of the American skipper and his officers at being compelled to lose so much valuable time was proportionate. However, there was no help for it. The passengers were all ordered upon deck, ranged in the fore part of the ship, and after being singly scrutinized by the Bow-street officers, passed aft, if not the man wanted.

Whilst my stepfather and his comrade were still engaged in civilly snappish confab, if such a phrase be permissible, with the American officers, I was pushing, through the crowd of passengers, urged by a vague fear that Watson might after all be amongst them. Suddenly I started, as if an adder stung me. The reader must not forget, that not only was my boy-vanity deeply engaged, but that should Watson be taken, awkward, perilous disclosures affecting my precious self might come out on his trial.

Yes, I started as if an adder stung me; for there before me was John Watson—his face livid, his knees knocking together, in the very ecstasy of terror. I knew him as instantly as he knew me, through his disguise, that of a stout Quaker, wearing an extensive broad-brimmer, a flaxen wig, and blue spectacles, was, as a disguise not meddled with, stripped away—capital. What mischievous fool or knave could have prevailed to mar so promising a project; one that, but for that exasperating interference, must, it was plain, have been successful! I did not then know, could not have believed, that it was I who had been purposely misled—it being feared that boyish indiscretion might at any moment make shipwreck of the scheme; or my stepfather, receiving a hint, or conceiving a suspicion of my agency in the business, might wheedle or whip me into confessing all. It could, at all events, the cunning fools reasoned, do no harm to keep me in the dark as to where Watson would embark, —then he could sleep in spite of thunder! Thomas Jebb, *not* being a boy, might of course be confided in—as his services would be required—at least to that extent. The idiots!

I repeat, that at that moment I had not the faintest suspicion that *I* could have been purposely deceived. Could I have thought so, I hope resentment for having been so treated would not have prevented me from making a last effort to save the seemingly-doomed man.

I struggled out of the mob of passengers, almost all of whom were rowing, clamoring, swearing, at being compelled to undergo the insolent scrutiny of Bow-street fellows—the servile tools of an infamous aristocracy; and they heartily hoped Watson—it was soon known whom the Officers were in search of—had escaped the mercenary bloodhounds set upon his track.

A hundred lights were dancing in my eyes and flashing in my brain. I could not endure the thought of Watson being carted off as it were to the gallows. To succour, protect any one, is almost invariably to become deeply interested in, attached to him or her. And my pride fiercely rebelled at the notion of being foiled, defeated in the very moment of supposed victory.

Ay, but how resist defeat—seize and bind that vanishing victory? That was the question. An insoluble one it for some time appeared to be. Presently, as I watched the procedure going on—the division of the passengers into two parties, those who had passed the ordeal and those who had not—the “All right” of the officers, usually responded to by a curse or other fierce rebuke of their d—d insolence,—I noticed one man, standing close by Watson; and exhibiting almost as much trepidation as the proclaimed “Traitor.” Didn’t I know that man? His features seemed familiar to me. By Jove! he was Fleetwood, the runaway bankrupt builder, of Pimlico. The idea which gleamed before me widened, brightened with every passing moment. Fleetwood was not unlike Watson: the same age, complexion, stature, or nearly so. By Heavens! the thing might be done! and all Fleetwood himself would have to apprehend if taken back to London was the compulsory surrender of his person and plunder to the Commissioners of Bankruptcy. Not pleasant processes, it may be, but much preferable to being hanged by the neck ‘twixt earth and sky till you are dead. There was not a single pulse-beat to be lost, and mine was going at a gallop—so fast that I could hardly manage to scribble in pencil, on a leaf torn from a memorandum-book, these few words:— “Never say die! There’s life in a mussel, yet! Be ready to take prompt advantage of any row or confusion which may occur to slip over amongst the ‘passed’ passengers. Whisper you are Watson, and, my life upon it, not one will expose the trick.”

Sidling again amongst the fast-diminishing ranks of unexamined passengers, I contrived to pass the slip of paper, unobserved, into Watson’s hand. A minute afterwards his half-hopeful look gave assurance that he understood me.

My part in the play was next to come, and quickly. My cue for going on would be the officers’ “All right,” as they passed the man immediately in front of Fleetwood.

“All right!” Instantly I sprang forwards, seized the absconding bankrupt by the arm, exclaiming as I did so, “This is he! This is the villain! I know him well!” The unfortunate man struggled furiously, yelling with rage and spluttering out indignant denials that he was Watson! The officers, supposing that I meant that he *was* Watson, flung themselves upon him, and, after a brief struggle, mastered his desperate resistance, and got on the handcuffs. That done, they looked closely at his features—searched for the marks by which the real Watson could be unerringly identified.

“This fellow is not Watson!” exclaimed my father, turning angrily upon me. “What the devil did you mean by saying he was?”

“I did *not* say he was Watson. I never thought of saying so. He is Fleetwood, the bankrupt builder of Pimlico, for whose apprehension a considerable reward has been, as you know, offered.”

“By Jove! the lad is right. It *is* Fleetwood! Well, little fish are sweet, and not to be sneezed at, especially as it may be feared we shall not, this time at all events, succeed in hooking the big one. Stand aside for the present, Mr. Fleetwood.”

During the bustle and confusion Watson had adroitly passed over among the examined passengers, who, as the whisper circulated that he was the political fugitive Watson, closed round and hid him from view. Most of the crew and all of the passengers—except Fleetwood, absorbed, blinded by his own misery—were witnesses of the dodge, but not one gave a hint, by word or gesture, to the officers; and they, suspecting nothing, proceeded with their work; which terminated, they searched the ship, equally without success of course. The American skipper, who had been for some time waxing terribly wroth, at last gave orders to fill—remarking, as he did so, with a savage growl, “that if the darned Britishers did not go over the side into their boat pretty smart, they would have the pleasure of seeing New York before they did Liverpool again.”

This perfectly serious menace quickened our motions considerably; and we were in a very few minutes pulling for the mouth of the Mersey, with the two prisoners Thurston and Fleetwood securely in hand. That was something no doubt, but, as a compensation for Watson’s non-capture, scarcely worth a thought—as the officers’ angry, contemptuous looks, as they eyed the crest-fallen captives, abundantly testified. There was a sardonic sneer glistening out of Thurston’s grey eyes and curling his thin lip, as he returned the officers’ scowl, which I could not at first comprehend.

“The *Washington*,” said Thurston, who had been observing for a minute or two the fast disappearing ship—“The *Washington* is hull down already; it would require a lively craft to overhaul her, and John Watson may hug himself on his safety as confidently as if she were already moored in New York harbour!”

“What’s the fellow prating about?” growled my stepfather, fiercely. “What does he know about Watson?”

“Only this,— that he is on board the *Washington*! That you wonderful clever fellows let him slip through your buttered fingers as easily as a live eel could!”

“That’s a lie, Mr. Thurston! Had Watson been on board the *Washington*, we should have him here as safely as you and Fleetwood.”

“John Watson *is* on board the *Washington*, I tell you, disguised as a Quaker! Why, you must have seen him in the crowd, wearing a tremendous broad-brimmed hat and blue spectacles! I had climbed up the ship’s side, just to see what was going on, and spied him out—knew him at a glance. You must, I say, remember having seen such a man; and you can’t remember having examined, questioned him? Ah, you may well look at one another,” continued Thurston, with exultant glee. “He slipped aft when you were so busy with friend Fleetwood here. Cleverly done, upon my soul! very cleverly done indeed! I glory in the fellow. Ho! ho! Wonderful cute chaps are our celebrated ‘Runners!’ The notion of anyone throwing dust in *their* eyes! Quite impossible, of course! Not to be done; certainly not. Here’s to John Watson’s jolly good health,” added the spiteful swindler, drawing a pocket-pistol from his vest; “and wishing, with all my heart, I was as certainly on board the *Washington* as he that is. Never mind, gentlemen thief-catchers; keep your spirits up, as I do. Better luck next time, perhaps, for you as well as me. But, really, it must be aggravating to have had the man in the hollow of one’s hand and let him get away, with no chance of setting your blessed eyes on him again! I should be fit to hang myself if

I were you; I should indeed. And, Lord! what a wiggling you'll get from the nobs, when it comes to be known. I'll take care it *shall* be known. Lose your berths, of course! Mean—mean, Mr. Runner-the-second, and almost as clever as your pal,” added Thurston, as the officer, feeling riled and hardly knowing how to vent his spite, clapped a pair of handcuffs on the cashier's wrists. “Mean, Mr. Runner; but there is some excuse to be made for men who have met with such a terrible sell. Watson will, no doubt, be printing it in the New York papers, headed ‘The famous Bow-street Blockheads!’ Ho! ho!”

Waters, Thomas. [Pseud.] [Attrib. William Russell.] *Autobiography of an English Detective*. NY: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1864.