

## My Kinsman, Major Molineux

By Nathaniel Hawthorne

### Chapter One A Young Stranger Arrives

One summer evening, not long before the American Revolution, a small boat arrived at the edge of a quiet colonial town. The moon was bright in the sky. A young man, about eighteen years old, stepped out of the boat and onto the wooden dock. His name was Robin.

Robin had traveled more than thirty miles on foot and crossed the river by paying the ferryman with his last few coins. He was from the countryside and had come to the town to find his relative — Major Molineux, a respected officer who had promised to help him start a new life.

Robin's clothes showed he was from a humble background. He wore a grey wool coat, blue yarn stockings, and strong leather pants. A three-cornered hat, once worn by his father, sat on his curly brown hair. Under one arm he carried a thick oak stick, and over his shoulder was a small, almost empty bag.

Still full of energy despite the long day, Robin walked forward with confidence. But soon he stopped, realizing something important — he didn't know where Major Molineux lived.

He looked around. The street was narrow, and the wooden buildings on each side looked old and simple.

"That house can't be his," Robin said to himself. "Nor that one, with the broken window. I should've asked the ferryman, but maybe the next person I meet will help."

As Robin walked further, the street became wider and the houses more respectable. He noticed an older man walking ahead and hurried to catch up.

The man wore a long dark coat and a large gray wig. He walked slowly, tapping a long cane on the stones and making a strange double cough — "*hem, hem*" — every few steps.

Robin touched the man's coat politely.

"Good evening, sir," he said. "Can you please tell me where my kinsman, Major Molineux, lives?"

The man turned sharply. He had a long, thin face, and his eyes filled with anger.

"Let go of me, boy! I don't know that man. Show respect, or you'll find yourself in the stocks by morning! Hem, hem!"

Robin stepped back, shocked. The man walked away, leaving Robin standing alone while loud laughter echoed from a nearby barbershop.

Robin frowned but quickly smiled at his own mistake.

"He must be a country official who never met the Major," Robin thought. "He didn't need to be so rude. Next time I'll choose a better guide."

Now Robin wandered into a maze of small, crooked streets near the harbor. The smell of the sea filled the air, and the tall masts of ships stood like trees in the moonlight.

He walked past quiet shops and closed windows. Finally, he came to an inn with a large sign swinging in the wind — it showed a heroic soldier and the words: *The British Hero Tavern*.

Through the open window, Robin could see people sitting at a table full of food. He hadn't eaten since morning, and the delicious smells made his stomach ache.

"If only I had more money," he sighed. "But once I find the Major, he'll give me a warm meal."

He stepped into the tavern. Inside, the room was dark and full of tobacco smoke. Groups of men — sailors and workers — sat talking, drinking punch, and eating. Some looked rough and wild, others tired and quiet. In the darkest corner, Robin noticed some countrymen eating simple food from home. He felt a connection to them but didn't speak.

At the door stood a man with unusual features: a wide forehead, hooked nose, glowing eyes, and deep eyebrows. Robin stared, unsure whether to trust him.

Then a short man in a dirty apron approached. He was the innkeeper, and though his voice was sharp, he spoke politely.

"Welcome, sir! From the country, I suppose? A fine town, this. Would you like supper?"

Robin smiled and stood tall.

"Thank you, my friend. I might return for supper — when I have more than a three-penny note! For now, I need to find my kinsman, Major Molineux."

The innkeeper suddenly turned to a note on the wall and read it loudly:

"Ran away from his master — Hezekiah Mudge. Gray coat, leather pants, third-best hat. Reward offered."

He looked Robin up and down.

"Better move on, boy."

Robin felt insulted and nearly lifted his heavy stick in anger. But everyone in the room stared coldly, and he changed his mind. As he left, the strange man at the door sneered at him, and laughter followed Robin into the night.

"Why do they mock me for asking about Major Molineux?" Robin thought. "If I met one of these fools in the forest, I'd teach him a lesson!"

He walked away from the noisy inn, still determined to find his relative — but beginning to feel the city was not as kind as he had hoped.

---

## Chapter Two Faces in the Shadows

After leaving the tavern, Robin walked through the city's darker, more confusing streets. He passed alleys filled with shadows, buildings leaning at odd angles, and quiet homes where only an upstairs window showed light. The smell of tar and the creaking of ship ropes in the harbor reminded him he was near the water. But he had no idea where he was — and still no sign of Major Molineux.

Robin felt both tired and hungry. His feet ached from the long day's travel, and his stomach growled. Still, he walked on, hoping someone might give him useful directions.

Suddenly, he noticed a sign above an old wooden house — *The British Hero Tavern*. Inside, voices laughed, sang, and talked loudly. A window stood open, and warm air filled with the scent of roasted meat and ale floated outside.

Robin paused and looked inside. He saw a large table with guests enjoying supper and drinks. For a moment, he imagined himself among them. But he had no money. His only hope was to find the Major.

"He'll welcome me and feed me," Robin whispered to himself. "So I'll ask here again."

He entered the inn. It was darker than expected. The air was thick with tobacco smoke. Men in seamen's clothes leaned over drinks, shouting stories and laughing. Others sat alone, drinking silently.

Robin noticed two or three countrymen in a dark corner, quietly eating bread and bacon they had brought from home. He felt a sense of brotherhood with them but didn't approach.

Instead, Robin's eyes were drawn to a man standing near the door. He looked unusual — almost frightening. His forehead bulged strangely, his nose curved like a hawk's beak, and his deep eyes glowed like coals. Robin couldn't forget that face. The man whispered with some rough-looking companions.

Just then, the innkeeper approached. He was a small man with a white apron. He bowed with sharp politeness and spoke in a thin, nasal voice.

"Welcome, sir. You must be from the country. What a fine evening! May I offer you a warm supper?"

Robin stood straight and tried to act confident.

"You're very kind, friend," he said. "But I have only a parchment three-pence to my name. I'm looking for my kinsman, Major Molineux."

Suddenly, the innkeeper turned and read from a notice posted on the wall:

"Runaway servant, Hezekiah Mudge. Gray coat, leather pants, third-best hat. One pound reward for return."

Then he looked Robin up and down with a grin.

"Better move on, boy."

The whole room burst into laughter. Even the man with the strange face sneered at Robin. Embarrassed and angry, Robin grabbed his cudgel but held back. He left the inn without a word, chased by their mocking voices.

"Why do they hate me just for asking a question?" Robin thought bitterly. "They laugh at me for being poor. But if I had met any of them in the forest, I'd teach them manners."

He walked faster now, through streets that twisted like a maze. Suddenly, he turned a corner and found himself on a wide, open street. The buildings here were taller and cleaner. Gas lamps lit the pavement, and people strolled about in fine clothes.

But Robin had lost his courage. After so many insults, he didn't dare ask again in public. Instead, he stared closely at every older man he passed, trying to recognize the Major's face.

The town was full of sights he'd never seen before. Some men wore gold-embroidered coats, powdered wigs, and shining swords. Others danced down the street singing silly songs. Robin felt small in his country clothes and plain hat.

"Am I the only honest man here?" he wondered.

As he crossed to the other side of the street, he stopped and listened. A slow, familiar sound caught his ear.

*Tap... tap... hem, hem... tap... tap... hem, hem...*

"No!" Robin whispered. "It's that old man again!"

He turned quickly and disappeared down a dark side street.

Robin's patience was almost gone. He had walked for hours, been insulted by strangers, and still hadn't found his kinsman. Worse, his stomach was empty and his legs were tired.

"If the next man doesn't help me," he thought, gripping his stick, "I'll make him help me — one way or another."

Just then, he saw a half-open door in a nearby house. A bit of red cloth, maybe a petticoat, showed behind it.

"A lady?" Robin wondered. "Maybe she'll be kinder than the men."

He stepped closer. The door opened wider, and a young woman stepped into the moonlight. She had a slim waist, dark eyes, and wore a bright red petticoat. Her smile was inviting, and her voice was sweet.

"Major Molineux lives here," she said.

Robin hesitated. The house looked too small and cheap for a man of the Major's rank.

"Are you sure?" he asked. "Is he home?"

"He's sleeping," she replied. "But come in. He would want his kin to feel welcome."

She reached out and touched his hand gently. Robin felt her pull him toward the doorway. Her smile was both kind and mysterious.

But before Robin could enter, a loud yawn came from down the street. A watchman appeared, holding a lantern and a long staff.

"Home, vagabond," the man said sleepily. "Or we'll set you in the stocks by sunrise."

The woman in the red petticoat vanished into the house.

Robin stood alone again, rejected once more. As the watchman walked away, Robin shouted after him:

"Wait! Do you know where Major Molineux lives?"

The man didn't answer. But Robin thought he heard quiet laughter floating down the street.

Then, from above, a window opened. A woman's arm waved, and a teasing voice called out to him. But Robin turned and ran.

---

### Chapter Three      Temptations and Confusion

Robin walked quickly now, no longer thinking about the people he had met but about how strange and cold this city felt. He had expected kindness, maybe even excitement, but all he had received were sneers, laughter, and rejection.

"Is this how people live in towns?" he thought. "No trust, no manners? Everyone hiding behind strange words and fake smiles."

The moonlight followed him as he turned onto a quiet street near the harbor. The buildings were old and crooked, and the road sloped gently toward the sea. Not a single person was in sight. Robin's thoughts were dark and confusing, just like the shadows around him.

Suddenly, he heard voices — rough and loud — coming from a corner ahead. A small group of men appeared, talking in a language Robin didn't understand. Their clothes were foreign, and their faces were hidden by the dim light. As they passed him, one of them shouted something rude. The others laughed. Robin stayed silent.

"What kind of town is this," he whispered, "where even strangers throw curses at you?"

He walked on. Then, something strange happened. He passed a church on the corner, its steeple tall and dark. As he turned past it, a man in a cloak came hurrying by. Robin quickly stepped in front of him and blocked his path with his oak cudgel.

"Wait!" he said. "Tell me where my kinsman, Major Molineux, lives!"

The man growled.

"Move, fool, or I'll knock you down."

But Robin didn't move.

"Not until you answer me!" he shouted. "Where is Major Molineux?"

The man stepped back into the moonlight. Robin froze. He had seen this face before — the same strange, powerful face with two colors: one side red like fire, the other black as coal. The eyes burned in the moonlight, and a wide grin stretched across his face.

"Watch this street," the man said in a deep voice. "Your kinsman will pass by soon."

Then he disappeared into the shadows.

Robin stood still. His body trembled, but not from fear — it was something more confusing. Was this all a game? Was he being tested? Or had he entered a town where nothing was what it seemed?

He looked across the street. A large, quiet building stood there. It had a balcony with pillars and a Gothic window above. Robin sat down on the steps of the church behind him, deciding to wait.

He stared at the building. Its windows reflected the moonlight, and its shape reminded him of home — but only for a moment. Everything here had a double meaning. It felt like the real world was hiding behind a mask.

“Maybe the Major really does live there,” Robin said to himself.

He tried to distract himself by watching the buildings and listening to the sounds of the city. Far away, he heard shouts, laughter, and what sounded like a horn or trumpet.

Then the street became quiet again. The silence made Robin feel even more alone.

He stood up and looked into the church through one of the windows. The inside was empty. The moonlight touched the pulpit and lit the open Bible on the altar. The light made the place seem almost magical — like heaven was watching, even if the people in this city weren't.

But even that holy feeling couldn't stop Robin's thoughts from returning to his family.

He imagined his parents sitting by the fire. His father, a clergyman, reading from the Scriptures. His mother silently praying. His brothers and sisters listening, tired but respectful.

He imagined the old tree in front of their house, where neighbors gathered to pray together at sunset. He remembered how he used to be bored by it all. But now, he missed it more than anything.

“Am I here, or still at home?” he asked quietly.

Just then, a footstep echoed through the street.

Robin sat up straight. A man walked by on the other side of the road. Robin shouted:

“Hallo, friend! Must I wait here all night for Major Molineux?”

The man crossed the street and approached. He looked different from the others — kind, cheerful, and intelligent. His face was open and friendly, and his voice was warm.

“Why are you sitting here, young man?” he asked. “Can I help you?”

Robin looked up with tired eyes.

“I'm not sure, sir. I've been walking all night, looking for Major Molineux. But I'm starting to wonder — is he real, or just part of a dream?”

The man smiled.

“Major Molineux? That name sounds familiar. Tell me, what's your business with him?”

Robin told him everything — how his father was a poor country clergyman, how the Major was a rich cousin who once visited them in grand fashion, how the Major had promised to help him or his brother. Since his brother would inherit the farm, Robin was chosen to come to the city.

“They say I'm a shrewd youth,” Robin added with a proud smile.

The man nodded kindly.

“I believe it,” he said. “And your story makes sense. Don’t worry — I think the Major will pass this way very soon. If you don’t mind, I’d like to sit with you. I’m curious to see how this meeting turns out.”

So the two sat together on the stone steps in the moonlight.

In the distance, the sounds grew louder — drums, horns, laughter, and marching feet.

“What’s all that noise?” Robin asked.

“Some celebration, perhaps,” the man said calmly. “This town is full of surprises.”

---

## Chapter Four      A Night of Revelations

Robin sat with the friendly gentleman on the church steps. The man’s calm presence gave him comfort, but his mind was still restless. The noises in the distance were getting louder — drums, shouting, laughter, and the deep blast of a trumpet.

“Sir,” Robin said, “do you hear that? What’s happening? It sounds like a crowd is coming.”

The man nodded.

“Indeed, something is going on. But remember, we are waiting for your kinsman, Major Molineux. I believe you’ll see him very soon.”

Robin stood and walked to the edge of the street. People were now opening their windows, poking out sleepy heads, asking one another what the noise was. No one seemed to know.

More people rushed into the street, half-dressed, tripping down steps and gathering to watch. The sound grew closer — feet stomping, voices laughing, and instruments playing in wild, chaotic rhythm. Torches lit the sky with an orange glow.

“It must be a parade,” Robin said. “Or some kind of celebration. I haven’t laughed since I left home. Maybe this will be fun.”

“Be patient,” the gentleman said gently. “Your kinsman is coming.”

At last, the crowd arrived. Hundreds of people filled the street. At the front was a horseman in military dress, holding a drawn sword. Robin recognized the red and black face — the same man with the double-colored features, now leading the parade.

Behind him came men dressed like Indians, clowns, and other strange characters. Their faces were painted, and their costumes were wild. Some banged on drums, others blew horns or shouted nonsense into the night.

Robin stepped back, surprised by the madness.

“It looks like a dream,” he said. “Or a nightmare.”

The torches lit the street with a dancing fire, making it hard to see clearly. Then came the music, terrible and loud. A strange cart rattled along the stones, pulled by jeering men.

“What are they carrying?” Robin asked.

The gentleman did not answer. He only looked at Robin with curious eyes.

When the cart stopped in front of them, the crowd went silent. Robin pushed forward to see. There, seated in the cart, was a man covered in tar and feathers, shaking with rage and shame.

Robin’s heart froze.

It was Major Molineux.

He was a large, proud-looking man, but his face was pale with fear and humiliation. His eyes were red, his lips trembling, his hands shaking. Yet he sat up straight, still trying to look noble.

Their eyes met.

Robin stared at him. The Major looked back and recognized Robin immediately. In that moment, they were no longer just relatives — they were two very different men, standing on opposite sides of something much larger than themselves.

Robin’s legs felt weak. He held onto the stone post to keep from falling. He felt fear, shame, and something else — a strange feeling deep inside him. It wasn’t just sadness. It was like laughter rising in his throat.

And he wasn’t the only one.

From the crowd came laughter — strange and wild. Robin turned and saw the watchman, awake now and giggling softly. The woman in the red petticoat stood nearby, her eyes sparkling with amusement. The innkeeper leaned out of a window, hiding his face in his white apron, laughing.

Then came the loudest laugh — two deep coughs and a high-pitched “Haw, haw, haw!” It came from a balcony across the street. Robin looked up and saw the old man with the cane, now in his nightcap, holding his sides with laughter.

“Everyone is laughing,” Robin whispered.

And then, he laughed too.

He couldn’t stop himself. All the confusion, the insults, the silence — everything built up until Robin let out a loud, echoing laugh. It was not the laugh of a boy anymore. It was something sharper, clearer, and strangely strong.

The laughter spread through the crowd like a wave. The noise shook the rooftops and rang out into the sky. Even the moon seemed to laugh, high above the madness.

And in that moment, Robin changed.

He no longer felt lost or afraid. Something inside him had broken — or maybe it had grown. His journey had not ended as he imagined, but something important had happened.

As the crowd moved forward again, carrying Major Molineux into the night, Robin stayed behind, quiet now.

“Well, Robin,” said the gentleman beside him, “are you dreaming?”

Robin blinked. His face was pale, his eyes no longer bright. He looked down at his hands, then at the street, and finally back at the man.

“Can you show me the way to the ferry?” he asked softly.

“You’ve changed your plans?” the man asked, smiling.

“Yes,” Robin said. “Thanks to you — and everyone else — I’ve found my kinsman. I don’t think he’ll want to see me again. And to be honest, I’m tired of town life.”

The man placed a hand on Robin’s shoulder.

“Not tonight, Robin. Rest here a few days. You’re a shrewd young man. You might just rise in the world — even without Major Molineux.”

---

## Chapter Five Laughter and Awakening

The wild procession had moved on. The crowd’s laughter still echoed faintly in the distance, like waves breaking far away. The street was quiet again, lit only by the moon and a few dying torch flames on the ground.

Robin stood beside the church, his hands resting on the stone post. His body felt weak, as if he had walked for days. But his mind was clear — clearer than it had ever been.

The friendly gentleman who had sat with him through the night still stood nearby.

“So,” he said softly, “was that the ending you expected?”

Robin looked up at him, his voice calm.

“No. I thought I would find Major Molineux, stay in his house, wear fine clothes, and begin a successful life. But that dream is over now.”

He paused, then added:

“And maybe that’s a good thing.”

The man smiled.

“You’ve grown, Robin. You’ve seen the truth of power, of pride, and of the world. What will you do now?”

Robin thought carefully. The idea of going home seemed warm and safe, but also small.

“I won’t leave just yet,” he said. “Maybe this city has something more to teach me. Not through my kinsman... but through myself.”

He looked down the street again. The torches had disappeared. The moon was sinking lower, and the town was falling back into sleep. But Robin was wide awake — not just in body, but in spirit.

“Do you know,” he said, “when I first came here, I felt important just because of my name. ‘My kinsman, Major Molineux,’ I kept saying. I thought that name would open every door.”

“And did it?” asked the man.

“It opened nothing,” Robin replied. “And in the end, it led me to a cart full of feathers and shame.”

They both laughed — not cruelly, but with understanding.

Robin remembered all the faces from the night: the angry old man, the laughing barbers, the mocking innkeeper, the woman in the red petticoat, the double-faced stranger. And finally, Major Molineux — proud, broken, exposed.

Each one had played a part in teaching him a lesson. It had been a hard night, but one he would never forget.

“This city is not what I thought,” Robin said. “It’s not soft. It’s not polite. But it’s real.”

The man nodded.

“You’re ready now.”

“For what?” Robin asked.

“For life. And it begins here.”

Robin took a deep breath. The fear, confusion, and anger had faded. What remained was something stronger — a sense of self.

“I will work. I will learn. I will grow,” Robin said. “Not because of my name, but because of who I choose to become.”

The gentleman placed a hand on Robin’s shoulder.

“You don’t need a kinsman, Robin. You need courage — and you have it.”

They stood together in silence as the sky turned a pale blue. The moon disappeared behind the rooftops, and the first light of dawn touched the stone church and the tops of the buildings.

The laughter of the night was over. What remained was understanding, and the start of a new beginning.

Robin stepped off the church steps, no longer searching for someone else to define his future.

He would build it himself.

— THE END —