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is completely blinded by his position, appointment and I dare say wealth, as well as gross stupidity. Stephen, please get me rid of him. He is making me ridiculous as well as himself.'

'My dear, I shall attend to [it].'

It was as soon as the South African squadron was fit for sea that the Admiral ordered them to sea, there to carry out a very considerable great-gun exercise fairly close in shore to please their Portuguese friends. The last preparation had not yet taken place before Stephen Maturin met Captain Miller. 'Oh Captain Miller,' he said, stepping aside detaching himself from his friends. 'I have a message for you (lowering his voice). Mrs Wood begs you will not call again with[out] an invitation.' Miller could not at first grasp the meaning though his complacent smile did fade. Stephen repeated his words.

'It is not true,' cried Miller. 'Christine never said that.'

'I assure you those were her words.'

'They were not.'

'You give me the lie?' asked Stephen, very low, approaching his face.

'Yes,' cried Miller, and struck him hard.

'You will appoint your friends,' said Stephen, 'These gentlemen --' nodding towards Harding and Joseph (who had rejoined a little after midnight), 'will attend to my interests. Good day to you, sir, until early tomorrow morning.' He touched his hat and walked on.

Harding was obliged to leave them to buy some particularly choice handkerchiefs for his wife, and Stephen said, 'Oh my dear Jacob, how sorry I am to entangle you with that silly little affair even before you have answered half your questions on your most admirable report on the Argentine. Shall we have time for a small, well-planned uncomplicated hernia before going deeply into politics? I should have to get word off to Sir Joseph directly since we must sail early tomorrow afternoon.'

'I should imagine so - [a] really healthy, lean patient with a simple hernia is no great matter and I have already coded the essence of my report. And a simple affair of this kind a blow given & resented is no greater matter either: small enough