

have improved in my art. Don't you remember telling me I ought to have a fixed object in life? Well, I have chosen painting for my object, and have followed it up closely ever since. I thought you would be pleased to hear what your good advice has done for me; I hope your own practice of it has been equally successful.'

Again I saw the tears rise slowly in the depths of her lovely violet eyes as she turned away pained and annoyed at his frivolous and impertinent tone; his gaze, which followed her every motion, saw it too, and in an instant penitence followed his cruel speech. He leaned toward her and said, hurriedly and brokenly, into a low voice that none but I overheard him, 'Forgive me; I don't know what I say or do. The sight of you has brought back hopes and longings I had thought long of me. I would never have come near you had I thought I should have been betrayed into saying anything that could have caused you a moment's pain. My heart is sore, and I have passed to-day through the bitterest trial life can bring me; but do not fear, I will distress you no more.'

She heard him, and gave him one timid, hurried, upward glance that spoke pardon, and I almost thought love, in its lingering tenderness; then turned away and busied herself with what was before her.

Hugh, after this, spoke no more to her; but I could see his gaze lingering on her every now and then, when he thought she was engaged with Captain Cameron, who sat on the other side of her father, with a look that revealed too plainly to my anxious eyes how utterly every hope and affection of his noble and still young life, with all its abundant promise of daring deeds and painstaking triumphs of art, was bound up in this young heiress, with her sweet pure beauty, her clever radiant smile, her love-lit tender eyes, her halo of golden hair, and all the dainty adornments of modern fashion helping, in their careful, tasteful arrangement, to heighten and enhance a beauty already too dangerous without their assistance. The lady on the other side of him was fully occupied talking to her next neighbor, so that he had nothing to call away his attention from Miss Meares; and I, who knew his mind, could read so clearly the torture he was undergoing, as he watched Cameron's attentions with wild, vindictive eyes, that I almost feared those around me must see it too. But no; they were all too busy with their own affairs, and I forced myself to amuse my friends also, for fear they might perceive to whom my attention was straying. The longest day must have an end, and this one at last wound slowly to its close. Our fair guests departed to adorn themselves for the ball we gave that night to celebrate the favorite's victory; and I went off to my room, dragging Hugh with me, much against his will, he, poor fellow, no doubt wanting to go and brood in solitude over his hard fate, and perhaps deplore the selfishness that led him to play into Cameron's hands in the matter of riding the horse. However, I would not take any refusal from him, and once safely inside my room I pushed him into a comfortable chair and left him for a few minutes in peace to collect himself and get over the exciting events of the day. After a few minutes I looked up from some writing I was busy with, and glancing at him, saw his brow contracted by a dark frown, and the whole expression of his face so painfully sad that I determined to try if I could console him. I therefore went quietly up to him, and laying my hand on his shoulder, said,

'Dear Hugh, what is the matter? Can I help you in any way?'

He started, and for a moment an impatient look crossed his face, but it faded away, and with his smile sweet as ever, but unspeakably sad, he answered,

'No, Cairnsford. What troubles me now is a thing that none can lighten or take away, and yet that causes more heart-burnings and miseries than anything on this wide earth—

... noble intellect, a fervid imagination, the attraction of a kindred soul in art, a mind that could enter into and sympathize with the slightest shades and inflections of feeling in his, while above all and over all was shed the clear unwavering light of lofty principles and unswerving loyalty to them. It was not so hard to understand after all, looking at it in this light, and I heartily wished that Hugh had never seen her, rather than that he should have been allured into a passion which, taking his nature and her character into consideration, I had every reason to believe he would never conquer. However, for the time being I contrived to divert him from his troubles, but was not surprised when he announced his intention of not going to the ball that evening. I thought he was right, as seeing her again would only pain him afresh; so bidding him good night, I hurried off to the ball-room, where, as one of the committee, I was obliged to put in an early appearance.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A THIEF IN THE DARK.

'Such an extraordinary thing has happened to me,' said Captain James at mess a few weeks after the race. 'Tell me, did any of you fellows see any one going into or out of my room yesterday while I was out?' He addressed the table generally, and looked ruffled and annoyed as he spoke; a most unusual thing with that laziest and most good-tempered of men.

We all looked up, and Melton, from the other end of the table, called out, 'I was in your room for a minute or two yesterday afternoon, to fetch a book you told me I would find there. Why, what's up?'

'Oh, it wasn't you I meant; but any of the servants, or people of that kind? You remember my telling you the day before yesterday of the curious letter I had received from that fellow Griffin, who had absconded and let me in for a bill I had backed for him, inclosing me bank notes to the value of the £500 for which I had been let in. Well, I intended to have lodged them at Cox's yesterday; but not being able to resist the temptation of a day's shooting unexpectedly offered, I went out, leaving it in my desk. To-day, when I went to look for it, it was gone clear and clean, leaving me without any clew by which I can trace it, as I had forgotten to take the number of the notes.'

'By Jove, that is too bad! It must be looked into,' growled Major Porter through his bristly red moustache, and coloring up at the bare thought that such a thing could have happened in his regiment, while every one's face expressed in various degrees more or less concern.

'Did you see any signs of the room having been disturbed, or did it look just as usual when you went in?' asked James, after a pause, of Melton.

Hugh smiled, as did many others round the table; for it was well known that James besides being the most indolent man in the regiment, was very probably, in right of that attribute, also the most disorderly, his room always presenting an appearance that conveyed to one's mind the idea of a Bedlamite's paradise. A boot in one corner, a sword in another, a regimental coat lying here, a pair of trousers there, pipes strewn the floor as though sown broadcast over it, the above-mentioned desk lying open topsy-turvy under the table, its contents flitting playfully about the room as the summer breeze floated in through the open window—these were a few of the most ordinary appearances of the chamber, so that it was no wonder Hugh smiled as he answered, 'I did not observe anything unusual in the appearance of the room, but—' Here he stopped and hesitated for a moment.

'But what?' asked James.

... effort my inclination to take the young snob by the neck and pitch him out of the room—it would have been still more odd had he been in the room and had not mentioned it. And now once for all, gentlemen, whoever dares to breathe a word of the kind you have just been uttering before me must recollect that I shall consider all such speeches as direct insults to myself, and shall take measures accordingly.'

'No, Cairnsford, this is my affair,' said a grave voice behind me, while a hand was laid on my shoulder. 'I heard what these gentlemen were saying as I came into the room, and I warn them that any remarks reflecting on my honor will require to be vindicated and upheld in a way that they may not wish.'

'You forget,' said Tufton, with a sneer, 'that to people suspected of appropriating what does not belong to them it is not considered necessary to offer satisfaction. Indeed, as gentlemen we couldn't do it.'

I was looking at Hugh, and saw the blood mount in a hot flush over his face, and a steel-blue light gleam in his dark eyes, as with a bound like a panther he sprang forward, and before the impudent youth could stir, he was held fast by the collar in Hugh's muscular grasp. Melton carried in his hand a strong cutting whip (he had just come in from riding Spitfire), and raising it, while the frightened youth vainly struggled to get free, he appeared about to administer a correction which, however severe, the cub had certainly merited. I was, however, for his own sake about to interfere, and beg him not to yield to an impulse of passion, when, dropping his whip, Melton flung the struggling sub violently from him, saying:

'You are not worth it; the lesson would be lost on such as you. Stay,' he added, in a commanding voice, as thoroughly crest-fallen Tufton was trying to sneak out of the room, 'let me hear who put this honorable idea into your head, for I don't believe your brains would ever have invented it without assistance.'

'Ah,' said the cub, brightening up, as he thought of bringing more influential names than his own into the same scrape, 'I heard Captain Cameron saying he thought it odd, and that he wondered Captain James had not inquired more particularly of you at what time you had been there, how long you had staid, where you got the book, and all the rest of it; and Layton, with whom he was talking, said such an idea would never have entered into his head, but that now it was talked of it certainly did appear suspicious.'

'So, then, Cameron is the gentleman to whom I am indebted for these insinuations,' said Hugh, slowly, with a puzzled look on his indignant face that gradually assumed a more determined and convinced expression, while even his very lips grew white, and the veins in his forehead swelled with some hidden emotion. 'You may go,' he continued, turning to Tufton, 'and remember, though you may think yourself above giving me satisfaction, I can get it out of you in such fashion as may make you wish you had been a little less particular.'

Tufton slunk off, looking very much like a whipped hound, and then Melton, turning to the rest of us, said:

'Now, gentlemen, after all that has passed, it is necessary that I should see Cameron, and find out what foundation that puppy had for mixing my name up in this affair. There is no doubt he will be willing to give such an explanation as will satisfy me, and explain his meaning to have been void of offence.' So saying, he walked quickly out of the room, and we saw him take the way to Cameron's quarters. What occurred there I did not hear for many a long month after; but as this seems the proper place for it, I shall relate what happened, just as Hugh afterward told me.

When he entered Cameron's room that gentleman was looking over some papers, but on seeing who his visitor was, he shuffled

could not bear it; and knowing where this money was, I was unable to resist the temptation, and took it. He could well spare it, and I intended to pay it back on my marriage; indeed I did; he added, with vehement assertion, seeing, no doubt, in Hugh's face that he did not believe this last statement.

'My duty is only too clear,' answered Hugh; 'I must tell James what I know. I could never have believed it, Cameron, and am indeed sorry for you; but I must do what I feel to be right.'

'Yes, and be asked for your proofs,' sneered Cameron, who, driven to desperation, now determined to put a bold face on it and brazen the matter out. 'I think you forget all about them, but they are very necessary, I can assure you. My word is as good as yours, and I have taken good care you should be under suspicion already. Any thing you may say of me will only confirm the rumors afloat about yourself, as every one will think you accuse me to try and divert attention from your own proceedings.'

It was too true, and for a moment Hugh was almost overwhelmed by the desperate situation in which he found himself. He had too great command over himself, however, to show how deeply his enemy's arrows had penetrated, and after a moment's silence, during which time he reflected that he must dare all or lose all, he resolved from his knowledge of Cameron's antecedents to draw a bow at a venture, and see what success would follow his audacity.

'Proofs!' he repeated, with a light, confident laugh that had a touch of cynicism in its tone. 'I haven't got them now, but I can have them before night-fall. It will only be necessary to frighten your friend Mr. Solomons into letting us look among his entries for your last payment. The amount was £400, I think, and the time about ten days ago—' He would have gone on, but Cameron interrupted him.

'Are you the devil in person, or have you been reading my papers, Melton?' he asked. 'Curse you! What do you mean by meddling in my affairs?'

'You seem to forget,' answered Hugh, quietly, satisfied that he had got the clue to this affair, 'that you began the matter by interfering with my honor and good name. In my attempt to vindicate these I have discovered what is to me an indescribably painful secret, which, however, can now be a secret no longer, as I feel it to be my duty to acquaint James at once with all I have found out.'

'Melton, for Heaven's sake have a little pity!' wildly entreated Cameron. 'Consider the shame and sorrow you will cause my intended bride; for her sake, if you are a man, spare me.' I swear solemnly never to commit such an action again, and to restore the money with interest as soon as I can get such a sum together.'

At the mention of Cameron's intended bride Hugh's face paled, and his lips quivered with an emotion that he could not repress as he thought of her whom he loved united to such a reptile as this before him.

Cameron saw the change in his countenance, saw in it a ray of hope, while it aroused in him a bitter hatred of the man who loved his beautiful betrothed, and to whom, his heart told him, she was not perhaps as indifferent as she might be.

Following up this ray of hope, he continued driving in the wedge deeper where he saw the point had penetrated. 'Think,' he said, 'of Mand. I admit I am most unworthy of her, but she does not know it; she believes me to be all she would wish me to be, and it would break her heart could she see to what depths I have fallen in my struggle to clear away those debts that raised impediments to our union. Think of her, so tenderly loved, so carefully reared, so noble and so upright in all her feelings, withering slowly away under the disgrace, or dying of

that Captain Melton, having been some little time in the room looking for a book, should neither have disturbed the thief nor seen any appearance of the desk having been tampered with, and I certainly wonder Captain James had not questioned him more closely as to the aspect of the room and the time at which he went there, with a view of finding out what people were likely to be about at that particular hour. It seems you have been drawing disagreeable conclusions from those very harmless and natural remarks. I trust you will not do so in future, and I hope Melton will accept my apology for having unintentionally given rise to slanderous reports.'

Melton muttered something about "Certainly," and "Pray say no more about it;" but his face was grave and annoyed; while Tufton looked wretchedly sat upon, and didn't seem to know whether to leave the room or remain where he was.

So that matter was, or ought to have been, settled; but as we all know, it is far easier to set bad reports going than to stop them once they get afloat; and more than once I perceived after this some of the younger fellows, who had not yet learned to know and esteem Melton's character, and others who, though older and knowing better, yet hated him because his pure and noble life shamed theirs, whispering together in a mysterious manner, always stopping suddenly when either Hugh or I approached them; a precaution which was certainly wise, as I doubt whether either of us would have heard their discourse with patience.

The golden autumn days flew by quickly I had one or two good days among the stubble and turnips, while Hugh worked away with unremitting vigor at his beloved art; it was his companion and friend, his solace in trouble, his inspiration in joy. Always busy, his fingers seemed never to lag, his mind never to weary of it; and I often envied the marvelous power of forgetting his griefs in a fairy-land of his own creation that he seemed to possess. And yet not forgetting; I am wrong in using that expression. Properly speaking, he did not forget his griefs; he bore them with a calm fortitude that rose more from deep, strong feeling well controlled than from any other cause, and he would set himself to work in order that constant occupation might prevent his mind from dwelling on its troubles, and eating itself away in useless repining.

### CHAPTER IV.

#### THE CROQUET PARTY.

It was during that short golden summer we generally have in the beginning of October—when the leaves don their gayest colors, crimson and bronze, scarlet and glowing yellow, when the hills are hazy in the distance, and a bluish vapor hangs over moor and upland—that Hugh, I, and several of the others, Cameron among the number, were invited to the last croquet party at Lady A——'s charming place, six miles out of Aldershot, on the London road.

We were asked at three o'clock to play croquet until five o'clock tea, after which those who liked might play again, or stroll in the grounds until six o'clock, when we were to dine, and end the evening by dancing. Hugh was not able to go early with me, but he promised to follow in time for the dance; so Cameron, I, and one or two others went before, to assist at the croquet and get as much fun out of the day as circumstances permitted, it being generally feared among us that before long we should be ordered out to India, and have to bid a long farewell to the pleasures and pastimes of "merrie England."

To be continued.