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Plot That Failed; OR, Love That Would Not Be Denied.

CHAPTER III.

In the few minutes consumed by Captain Murpoint in mastering the emotion which the sight of his old friend's daughter had produced, Mrs. Mildmay had recovered from her astonishment, and, with her well-bred composure still a little shaken, came forward, with outstretched hand.

"And is it indeed, poor John's old friend, Captain Murpoint?" she said, with a little smile.

"It is, indeed," said the captain, taking her hand, and bending over it with graceful embarrassment. "Alas, that I should return to find his place empty! Yet scarcely empty, for here is a beautiful reflection of my dear friend's face and form."

And he turned his eyes with affectionate admiration upon Violet again.

Mrs. Mildmay sighed, then quickly called his attention to her guests.

"We have got half through dinner, Captain Murpoint, as you see, but I am sure my friends will not mind a little extension of the meal, while fresh courses are prepared. Let me introduce you. Mrs. Dodson, this is an old friend of Violet's father, consequently a dear friend of ours, Captain Murpoint."

The captain's quick, black eyes rested for a moment upon her and Mrs. Dodson's physiognomy while the introduction was being made; as quickly passed over Mr. and Mrs. Giles and the vicar's, but rested a little longer when Mr. Leicester's turn came, and grew more searching in their expression as they met the calm regard of the young man.

But the keenness of the scrutiny—for it was nothing more nor less—was tempered by a smile. Captain Murpoint possessed the rare art of smiling well.

"I beg that you will not delay the meal, nor change a single course. I am a case-hardened traveller, and too used to short fare to think anything of the loss of soup and fish. Indeed, my dear madam, if you will pardon me for a few moments I will exchange

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these dusty and really disgraceful garments for something more orthodox and suitable."

Mrs. Mildmay bowed graciously, and turned to a footman.

"I have brought my man with me—a faithful fellow, who has been my companion in fair weather and foul all over the globe," said the captain, moving toward the door. "Pray, let me implore you not to spoil your dinner."

So saying, he passed through the doorway, outside which, eying the elegant room with a satisfied and comprehensive gaze, stood the grim-faced, sharp-eyed "faithful fellow," the captain's servant.

Violet had not spoken a single word save those she had addressed to the captain. A sweet, solemn gravity had settled upon her fair, young face, brought there by the memories of her father, which this stranger's arrival had called up.

She sighed when his soft, pleasing voice had died away, and turned almost with a start to her neighbor, Mr. Leicester.

"How strange—is it not?" she said.

"Very," said Mr. Leicester, looking at her, thoughtfully. "Captain Murpoint came unexpectedly?"

"Quite," said Violet.

Leicester Dodson toyed with his fork.

"Do you remember him?" he asked.

"I have never seen him before," replied Violet, quietly. "But he is such an old personal friend. My father never wrote me a letter without mentioning him."

Leicester, with all the interest he felt showing plainly in his face, nodded.

"They met in India, of course. Captain Murpoint must be a younger man than Mr. Mildmay would have been."

"Yes," said Violet, "much younger. Papa told me how much once, but I have forgotten."

Then her aunt spoke to her, and Leicester fell into a muse. Captain Murpoint's advent seemed to have struck all his eloquence dumb.

The rest of the guests were chattering with quite a mild excitement, but he sat turning the fork over and following the pattern of the tablecloth with that grim silence which did not sit ill upon him, though it would have made some men look sulen.

Suddenly the hum died out, and Leicester, looking up, saw that Captain Murpoint's re-entrance was the cause.

If Captain Murpoint had looked gentlemanly in his traveling suit he certainly looked distinguished in the orthodox army dress.

Leicester Dodson's eyes, as they watched him take his place between Violet and her aunt, took in every detail of the well-proportioned figure from its breadth of shoulders to the long stretch of arm with its strength denoting muscular development.

But when he came to regard the face he was startled.

He had, on the captain's first entrance thought him rather handsome, but now, seeing him sideface, he was surprised to find that there was a sinister look about some feature that had an unpleasant effect.

Suddenly the captain turned full face to address Violet, and the displeasing expression had gone.

Then he turned again, and Leicester understood it.

One side of Mr. Murpoint's face was better looking than the other.

On the right side, in a line with the ear, there was a scar—a small white scar—too small one would have thought to have marred the face, but mar it, it certainly did, for, whether

the captain smiled or frowned, looked humorous or sad, that scar remained the same—inflexible, white, repulsive, giving the sinister cast to the right side of the face which had startled Leicester.

Was the captain aware of this blot on his beauty?

Certainly that scarred side of his face was not half so often seen as the other, and Leicester, who was observant as well as quiet, noticed that when he was spoken to, the captain invariably turned his left side with a smile to the speaker, and kept it turned until the speaker's gaze was withdrawn.

But Leicester was not allowed to continue his silent examination of Mr. Murpoint's features long, for that gentleman, having blunted his appetite upon the greater portion of a fowl, with a tact which was remarkable, soon engaged the whole table in conversation.

Then he found that he could not only smile well, but talk well also.

He started a topic, chased and ran it to death in a light, graceful way, then raised another.

The spirits of the party, which had grown somewhat low, rose rapidly.

The captain was humorous, and made Miss Mildmay laugh.

Then, with a graceful ease, he veered round into the pathetic—some little Indian story—and the ladies sighed sympathetically.

As suddenly he managed to engage Mr. Leicester Dodson in a discussion on the catamounts, and proved to that gentleman, who knew the East pretty thoroughly, that Egyptian antiquities were also not hidden mysteries to the wonderful captain.

All the time he managed to eat in a noiseless, well-bred way about three times as much as any one else, and contrived to divert to his own plate the nice cuts and choice corners of the poultry and saddle of mutton.

He drank, too, with a quiet enjoyment of the good wine, which met with a hearty sympathy from the butler.

"This wine," he said, lifting his glass and bowing to Miss Mildmay with infinite grace, "this wine, my dear friend brought from India—oh! my dear young lady?" turning to Violet. "Many and many glasses have your father and I drunk in the hot sunset. I have a wonderful memory for wine and faces. Do you know," he broke off, suddenly, addressing Leicester, who was regarding him with his quiet, earnest gaze, "I fancy that I have seen you before? Have I?"

"I can't say. 'Tis possible," said Leicester. "Have you any recollection beyond the indistinct surmise?"

"No," said the captain, hesitating. "Were you ever in India?"

"No," said Leicester. "I have traveled through the East, and know the Continent and England pretty well."

"Then you have the advantage of me," said the captain, setting his wine glass down, and looking round at the attentive faces. "I left my na-

ture land when a boy of eighteen, and returned only two days since."

"Ah," said the vicar, in his nervous, jerky style, "then you have much to see, Captain Murpoint. England is small, but precious in beauty. It can compare creditably with any other spot on earth, even in its most unfair and ill features. What is softer and more beautiful than Devonshire? What more grand than the Cornish cliffs? Ay, even in picturesque beauty it would be difficult to eclipse our little island. We defy you to find in any other part of the globe so weird and grotesque a piece of scenery as the Portland wastes."

The captain, with a smile, had turned his left side to the well-meaning, but rather long-winded cleric, and the butler was filling his glass with the wine which he had so highly praised.

(To be continued.)

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