

and he did, accordingly, and asked for Miss London. He was shown into the drawing-room, where she was presented to him, apparently only just returned from riding as she was in her hat and habit. She welcomed him with great *empressment*, but he, though feeling a little uneasy, rushed boldly at the matter in hand, and began—'I fear, Miss London, you must have misunderstood some words I made use of last night in requesting the honor of your hand for a dance. What I meant—'

'Oh no—not at all,' she interrupted. 'I understood you perfectly, dear Charlie, and have given it to you fully and freely, as you see,' at the same time laying her hand in his. 'Some one was saying to me just now that people might say I had misunderstood; but I answered that any one who dared say so to me I should, with my own hand, horse-whip within an inch of his life.' And she gave the strong cutting whip she held in her hand a switch through the air, within an inch of his shoulders, as she spoke. 'So you see, Charlie dear, there is not the least need to dread ill-natured remarks, and papa is ready to see you now. I told him all about it, and he will give me handsome settlements; we need not wait for your promotion, but can fix the day at once. I will go with you to papa, as he is sometimes difficult to get on with for those who do not understand him.'

'That is way Crookley was hooked, according to Soame's account, and, to look at her, one would think it likely enough. I hear she keeps the identical riding-whip that conquered the major under a glass case in her own room. The fear of it is what keeps him, in general, in such awe of her, I should imagine. Now, go on, Langham, and tell us what happened to Solace.'

'Where was I?—you have put me out,' said Langham, peevishly. He liked to have all the talking to himself, and felt aggrieved that Brabazon should have interrupted his story. 'Oh, I was telling you we went up to Camberbund for croquet, with the prospect of a dance afterward. I need not tell you that if Solace has a marked failing, it is a strong tendency toward a mild flirtation, enjoyed quietly, without too much excitement, over an ice or a jelly at a dance, or by the help of the language of flowers during a stroll in the country. That is his style. Rather too much in the milk-and-water line for me, as he always keeps half his mind on the watch for danger signals, and only goes into the business with the other half; but *chacon a son* *en ut*, and it is certainly the wisest way, after all.'

'Well, yesterday he had not been long at croquet when his till then unoccupied fancy became attracted by Miss London, a half-sister of Mrs. Crookley's, and without doubt a very pretty girl, only just come out from England to live with her sister. She and Mrs. Crookley are about the same height, and I suppose through some caprice of Mrs. Crookley's—they were that day dressed alike, besides that they resembled each other in the color of their hair and their tone of voice—both, in fact, spoke curiously alike; that unless you saw their face, you could not by the voice distinguish one from the other. Miss London is, however, as pretty as her sister is the reverse, and I could hardly wonder at Baby's unsophisticated mind being caught by so attractive an object. And then her get-up was so sweetly pretty, and she wore the palest cream-colored gloves, that fitted to perfection; she had an artless way of requiring the croquet balls to be set under the prettiest arched instep that any man ever had the pleasure of beholding. Her weakness was excusable, after all. We can pardon it; but for the safety of the regiment, my dear friends, let us all beg him next time to look before he speaks.'

'He, of course, joined in a game of croquet, playing on the same side as the young

and I will not have it there,' said the major, angrily. 'I must request you to allow people to move their own balls on this ground, and not to infringe the rules of the place.'

'I was not aware that bringing back a lady's ball when it had been sent over the boundary was an infringement of the rules,' replied Solace, sulkily, 'under the circumstances, I think you should have fetched it yourself, which would have obviated all this.'

'Oh, you think so, do you? I wonder who asked your opinion,' said Major Crookley, insultingly. (He is rather basty, and his temper was now thoroughly up.) 'I think ladies are as well able to fetch their balls as gentlemen; and I shall make it a rule in future, on my ground, that they do so.'

'Then I should think very few ladies will honor your ground with their presence,' said Solace, whose 'back was up' as the Yankees say.

'Might I ask what you mean by that speech?' asked the major.

'I mean what I say,' replied Solace.

'I suppose you wish to insinuate by it that I am no gentleman,' continued Crookley, getting more and more excited as his opponent became sulky and uncompromising.

'You may put what interpretation you like on it,' answered Solace. 'Anything will suit, I dare say.'

'Come, come, this will not do,' said Melton, stepping forward (he was there, too, for a wonder). 'Solace, you should not have transgressed the rules of the ground; and you, major, are, I am sure, putting an interpretation on his words Solace never would have given them. Do not let us spoil a pleasant party by such a foolish dispute. I want to join in the game, and I cannot get a mallet. Solace, give me yours, and take a stroll with Langham. He will show you all the beauties of the place, while the major and I will see which is the best man at croquet.'

'So the Baby, swelling with indignation, was turned over to me to be bear-lead about the place, while Melton went in for croquet and flirtation with pretty Miss London, whose blandishments, I fear, excited more response from our steady captain than they should have done, as I heard her tell her sister afterward Captain Melton was an angel, and he had the most perfect eyes she had ever looked at.'

'Come Langham, draw it mild, if you please, remonstrated Melton, laughing, 'your ears are too good, my dear fellow, and in repeating what they hear, I fear you sometimes say more than your prayers. Besides, consider my feelings; I know I ought to blush, but am so hardened I can not get one up, even to save my reputation before you all.'

'Is that all?' I said, as Langham proceeded to refresh himself with a draught of iced Moselle cup. 'I thought there was something more coming; but indeed that was foolish enough. Baby, my child, I hope you will be cautious, or the charming Amelia may have a chance of holding the horse-whip over your shoulders, as her sister did over Major Crookley's.'

'You are as bad as the rest, Cairnsford,' laughed Solace, with more good temper than he had shown at first. 'Why should not I admire a pretty girl, if I see one? and why should not I help her when she is in difficulties, if she asks me?'

'Why should he not, poor fellow?' chimed in Marshman. 'Of course he should, if he likes; we only want to keep him from running his innocent little head into a very dangerous slip-noose, from which he will never be able to extricate it if he once gets it in.'

'What are all you fellows making such a noise about? I have not half finished my story; and I declare one would think it war-

favor. Give me one flower out of you bouquet, that I may keep it in remembrance of this evening; you can not refuse me this little request. Just that one rose-bud; you will not, I am sure, be so cruel as to refuse it; there is no harm in it.'

'No harm in it, indeed!' said a man's voice behind them. 'I like that. Sir, I say there is harm in it, and you will have to do without a flower from this lady, as I shall not allow her to give you one.'

'And what business have you to interfere between me and any lady to whom I may make such a harmless request, I should like to know?' asked Solace, haughtily.

'I will very soon show you what right I have to interfere,' roared the Major, for it was none other than he, springing forward in an ungovernable passion, at the same time flinging away a cigar he had until that moment carried lighted in his hand, and aiming a blow at Solace's face with the white kid glove he had just been about to put on before returning to the dancing room. Solace, seeing his intent, stepped back quickly, and escaped untouched; but the insult was too marked, and turning away, he said, 'You shall hear from me again on this matter, Major Crookley. A friend of mine will come to you here immediately, as the affair had better be settled at once before it gets wind, when the authorities would interfere.'

'Very well, Sir,' answered the major, becoming calm enough when he perceived his insult had been taken up in the way he wished. 'I shall wait here for half an hour for your friend. If he does not come before that time time expires, I shall think even worse of you than I at present do.'

'Almost beside himself with rage, Solace walked off to me, and related what had occurred, begging me to act as his second, and to appoint a meeting at half past four o'clock in a secluded spot just outside the garden, on the banks of the river.'

'I tried at first to reason our friend Baby out of this absurd idea, representing that duels were forbidden by the regulations of the service, and that it would cost him his commission; but you have no notion how stiff an infantile mind can be until you have been placed in a position like mine.'

'Seeing I could not persuade him to listen to reason, I called Melton, who was equally unsuccessful, and who was at last obliged to say, 'Well, Langham, if it must be I should advise you to go and see Major Crookley; the half hour is nearly up, and it will not do to let him think any of our regiment were defaulters in an affair of honor. Stay, I will go with you, as I really think there must be some mistake. I do not think the major can be such a fool as to object to his sister-in-law giving a flower to any one she chooses. Solace, you wait here till we return.'

'We accordingly went to the garden, and in the appointed spot found Major Crookley. 'Ah,' he cried, on seeing us, 'you have only just saved yourselves; the half hour is almost up, and if you had not come in time to settle this little business, I should have been obliged to punish your young friend in some other way, instead of giving him the satisfaction of a gentleman, as I had intended.'

'Well, but Major,' said Melton, 'will you tell us what it is all about?' For Solace tells us it was about a flower he was begging from a lady; but that seems quite too foolish to believe. I am sure there must be some misunderstanding.'

'Misunderstanding, indeed!' replied the major, excitedly; 'it is a great deal too plain to me. I had come out here to sit in the cool night air with my wife, who was tired of dancing; I left her for a moment to go and light a cigar at a lamp in the verandah, and when I returned I found this fellow sitting beside her and making love to her, and begging flowers and keepsakes and what not. I just told him my mind straight out; and I will not say I did not provoke him to challenge me, but then I was quite justified in doing so by the circumstances of the case;'

until they are on the ground face to face; then imagine how he will look when he finds Mrs. Crookley is the fair case of strife.'

'I thought the idea good, and readily agreed to work it; but we were near failing in the beginning from the dreadful difficulty we experienced in keeping grave faces while we told the unhappy Baby the hour and place of meeting, with other arrangements, ending by requesting him not to allow people to see anything unusual about him, but to keep up dancing with his customary spirit till the guests separated, which they did about four o'clock. As soon as they were gone we seized on Solace, and dragged him off to the place of meeting.'

'We can sit here and smoke a quiet cigar,' observed Melton, 'until the time is up. We have only half an hour to wait; and in the mean time, old fellow, if you have any message to leave for any of your friends, tell me, for though I do not think matters will be as bad as that, still it is the correct thing to do, and we may as well do the proper thing as we are about it.'

'Yes,' interrupted Solace at this juncture, 'and a most heartless fellow I thought you Melton. You looked so cool and easy over it all, and asked me had I made my will in such a matter-of-fact manner that I thought you the most unfeeling monster I had ever met, and longed to be able to proclaim to the regiment what an unnatural ruffian you really were, instead of the kind, good-hearted fellow we had all thought you.'

'That will do, Solace,' said Langham, waving his hand serenely; your thoughts were very visible on your face, and I could repeat them all exactly as they passed through your mind if I considered them worth repeating. I only wonder how I ever kept my countenance; I am sure I have injured myself internally in my struggles to keep from laughing outright.'

'Time went on. Solace was worked into a white heat by Melton's friendly offers and my instructions and comforting assurances, and I was beginning to think we should have to take the other line, and make light of it to keep his nerves steady, though, to do him justice they stood the test wonderfully, when Major Crookley made his appearance.'

'Oh, here you are already!' he cried. 'I am glad you are so punctual. We shall get over this little business in a few minutes; and I do not want to be long, as Mrs. Crookley may take it into her head to ask me where I have been. I have brought a surgeon as well as my second, you see. I thought it likely one would be wanted.'

'Very well,' I answered. 'We had better now measure the ground and place the principals. You are neither of you inclined to apologize, I suppose?'

'No, indeed,' said Solace, stiffly; while Major Crookley did not seem to have heard my question, and began chatting to the surgeon with great volubility and ease of manner. Solace stood apart, looking as if he had swallowed a ramrod, and apparently not taking the smallest interest in our proceedings, though I am convinced he was watching out of the corner of his eye the whole time. The major had brought a very nice pair of pistols, which we determined to use, as they were the only ones to be got, and in a few minutes everything was ready. The principals were placed in their proper positions, and Melton was just about to step up and ask Solace how he could be so fearfully foolish as to run himself into such a scrape for Mrs. Crookley, when a dark figure rushed out from among the bushes coming from the direction of the house, and discovered to our astonished eyes the lady herself.'

'This is a pretty way to treat your guests!' she cried, turning on her husband. 'What do you mean by it? Do you think I will permit such performances here? Go back to the house instantly, and do not let me hear of your trying any thing of the kind again. Here, give me that pistol before you go; you

'Ensign Spot, of the 101st Native Infantry!' screamed Mrs. Crookley. 'The ungrateful girl! is that the way she treats me? She will have nothing to live on. He has not a penny, and she need not expect any thing from me, as she has not married to please me. I always intended her to make a good match, and now she has gone and spoiled all my plans. The ungrateful hussy!'

'Melton and I looked at each other, and went into internal convulsions of laughter; while the major sidled up to Solace, who was looking very glum, and holding out his hand, said:

'Well, it was a mistake, after all, and I am sorry for my part in it, and still more sorry that the girl has gone and made a fool of herself. You will forgive my hastiness, will you not? I really thought you were using me badly, and my temper is unfortunately soon put up. I must go now and see where that foolish couple have got to, as I should be sorry if Amelia got into trouble; but you will come in and take something before you go?'

'We declined this, however, and set off on our way back to A—; and if Solace does not know what it is to be chaffed by this time, I am much mistaken.'

'Bravo, Baby!' I cried, when Langham had finished. 'You got out of it splendidly, though I think that was more through good luck than good guidance. I hope your next flirtation will not have quite so exciting a termination.'

'Oh, I never flirt, I assure you,' answered Baby, gravely; 'and it's a great shame of all of you to be so eternally accusing me of it.'

'No, indeed, you never do flirt, and you never will, until the next time; but take care you do not do it once too often, and find yourself hooked some day before you know where you are. Now, Melton, come up into my room, for I want to have a chat with you.'

## CHAPTER IX.

### A MYSTERY.

When I brought Melton up to my room, and explained to him the cause of my long absence and its results, his anger exceeded even what I had expected and been prepared for. There came into his face such an evil look, that I could not help thinking how the best of us are at times. If Captain Cameron had come before him then I could not have answered for the results; neither reason nor friendship could have restrained him, and I determined to keep him in his room, if possible, till the first burst of his fury should have expended itself. It was then that he told me the affair about the money, saying:

'With such a villain I will keep no faith. I consider myself fully absolved from my promise by what has just passed. Now, Cairnsford, I must write at once to Mr. Meares, and tell him what I have heard. You are ready to corroborate my statements, are you not?'

'Stay,' I said, 'they will require proofs, and those we must get. He said St. Margaret's was burned, and the books with it. I do not remember hearing anything about it, and I think it would be well for one of us to get leave at once, and start on the spot for Calcutta, to investigate. I believe he was saying what was not true to mislead his wife; at any rate, we must try and get some proof besides our mere assertions, for though I think they would be sufficient to break off the match as far as the young lady is concerned, the parents might not see it in the same light. As I think Crusty is more obliging to me than to you, perhaps I had better apply for leave, and go on this errand. In the meantime, if you can dissemble, you must do so. Do not let Cameron think you know a word of this; let him imagine that I went away without telling you.'

To be continued.