

“Isn't there a Captain Melton in your regiment, Captain Cameron? The man there are all those curious stories about, I mean?”

“There is a Captain Melton,” he answered, “but to what stories do you refer, Miss Bruce?”

“Oh, you know very well,” she replied, “though I suppose you who are in the same regiment don't like repeating them. I mean those stories about some money he took, or at least is strong suspected of having taken, out of Captain James's room. They say the money has been returned since, and I dare say that is true; for when he found himself respected, he was no doubt afraid to keep it.”

I remained stupefied, unable to utter a word for a minute, so great was my astonishment, first at such a rumor being for a minute believed and repeated, and secondly, at its having attained such notoriety. Before, however, Cameron could answer, or I could interpose, a clear musical voice from the other end of the room, said distinctly:

“It is false; the vilest fabrication ever invented by slanderous tongues. None but those who envy Captain Melton his good reputation would have dared to coin so base a calumny.”

I turned whence the voice proceeded, and there, with her head erect, her dark eyes flashing, and her whole face flushed with generous and indignant feeling, sat Miss Meares. I had not observed her on the croquet ground, and yet she must have been out, as a lace shawl was thrown across her shoulders, and a dainty hat that seemed composed almost entirely of white curling feathers, lay beside her on the sofa.

Cameron's face was not pleasant to look at as he glanced at his betrothed; but before he could speak, Miss Bruce, said with the nearest approach to a sneer she could venture on when addressing a lady of so much importance as Miss Meares:

“Dear me, how very fortunate Captain Melton is in having such an advocate! But those things are said of him nevertheless.”

“Miss Meares is right,” interrupted Cameron; “Hugh Melton is a very good sort of fellow, and I am sure he has done nothing wrong, though it is true those curious stories are afloat. I wonder greatly what gave rise to them; it must have been some trifling indiscretion on his part.”

“Pardon me,” said I, here stepping into the room (he hadn't noticed me before, as his back was toward the window, and it was good to his face when he found I had been listening to his vindication of his absent comrade—a vindication carefully calculated to deepen in the minds of his hearers the impression that something was wrong, and that Captain Cameron was a very good fellow to take up the cudgels for him at all)—“pardon me, but you ought not to wonder how these reports arose, as you are perfectly aware that it was through some foolish remarks of yours, for which you were obliged to apologize publicly as soon as you were known to be the author of them.”

“Ah, yes; I remember that,” he stammered, greatly confused. “But I don't think all these rumors arose from that.” Here he stopped and busied himself in handing tea, looking all the time dreadfully small.

As for me, arming myself with a cup of tea, I marched straight up to Miss Meares, and presented it to her. While she was drinking it I could not resist showing my appreciation of her gallant defense of Hugh, and said:

“No one has a true friend in you Miss Meares, and you were right in every word you said, for a more upright and noble fellow than Melton does not exist.”

She glanced up brightly. “I am so glad you agree with me: I can not tell you how how indignant I felt at hearing such vile aspersions of his good name, made by those who neither know him nor are capable of comprehending or appreciating him did they know him. Are you a friend of his?”

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reason he had altered his mind; and there he was, with his sneaking, self-complacent smile and his croaking, insidious ways. Percy Langham, Tompleton, and one or two others of the nicest set were not with us; they would come out afterward. But their absence contributed greatly, no doubt, to the disagreeable nature of the voyage. We had been only four or five days at sea, and going well before the wind as we were, Hugh and I found it not unpleasant. Those who had been seasick were recovering, and beginning to crawl about, reminding one of sickly caterpillars, with their feeble gait and enormous appetites.

Hugh and I were standing leaning over the taffrail in the stern—I smoking, Hugh gazing idly over the blue expanse of water, sparkling under the crisp clear sunlight of an autumnal morning, and ruffled by a gentle breeze into innumerable foam-tipped wavelets—when, turning suddenly toward me with a kind of half-resentful, half appealing look, he said:

“Charlie, have you noticed anything odd in the manner of our fellows toward me lately?”

I turned with a surprised negative on my lips, when, as I did so, I saw at a little distance Cameron talking to Brabazon, a nice young fellow, not long joined, to whom both Hugh and I had taken rather a fancy. They were both looking at us, but perceiving that I was watching them, they turned away with a kind of confused manner, and walked off. I then remembered that for the last day or two Brabazon never seemed to have time to come and chat with us in the stern as he used at first; and whenever we had tried to stop him for a minute, he had hurried away, saying, “Excuse me, I am busy.” My answer, therefore, died away on my lips; for I began to feel that perhaps it might be as Hugh had suggested, though I had not yet remarked anything. He continued:

“I see, your silence tells me that you have noticed it. I am convinced Cameron is at the bottom of it. Wait and watch; you will see I am right; and if I am, I will tell you something I have hitherto kept concealed, greatly against my will, for I much wanted your counsel. A promise kept me silent however; but I shall consider myself absolved from it—at least with regard to you—if what I suspect be the case.”

We said no more then; but I was surprised at Hugh's mentioning a secret, as I thought we knew everything about each other; and also I was annoyed to think it possible that any one could presume to avoid him, or treat him as an unfit companion for the best among us.

I had not long to wait for confirmation of the suspicious Hugh had put into my head. That afternoon, as we sat in a snug little nook we had discovered among some coils of rope and bundles of sails, Brabazon and Solace came into our retreat, as though intending to sit there and smoke like ourselves.

“Ah, you have found out our hiding-place!” I exclaimed. “Isn't it jolly? There's room for you two. Come and have a chat with us.”

“Oh no; I don't think we can stay,” answered Brabazon, hurriedly, looking at Hugh askance, and seeming nervously anxious to draw Solace away with him.

Hugh looked at him calmly for a minute or two without speaking, and then raising himself slowly, but with determining expression in every movement, from the reclining position he had occupied, he said:

“You don't wish to be contaminated by my society. Isn't that it, Brabazon?”

The lad looked badly scared, and only stammered, “I—I—don't know what you mean, Captain Melton.”

“Come, speak the truth like a man,” he answered, sternly. “Don't be afraid. I shall keep all my wrath for those you have filled your mind with evil thoughts of me. You must tell me,” he continued, springing to his feet, and placing himself in front of the young fellow, who would gladly have escaped had he been able.

“Never mind, Brabazon,” interposed So-

lutionary excitement. “Isn't there a Captain Melton in your regiment, Captain Cameron? The man there are all those curious stories about, I mean?”

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“I thought as you do at first,” replied Brabazon; “but he explained that nothing would have induced him to betray the secret once he had allowed you, Melton, to remain in the regiment; but when he saw me drifting into a friendship with you, taken by your charming manner and frank face, he then considered it his duty to warn me of the character of the man I was disposed to admire. Even then he did not speak out explicitly, only hinted darkly all was not right, till, seeing at last that his innuendoes produced rather a contrary effect from what he wished he was obliged to be more distinct. Besides, he said that though fear had kept you from falling into a flagrant offense since then, still he saw by your manner that, far from being repentant, you felt nothing but hatred for the man who had spared you. He says he now sees it would have been better such a character should have left the regiment at once rather than remain in it to have the opportunity of influencing young fellows recently joined in a manner which can do them nothing but harm. Remember, Captain, Melton, Brabazon went on, apologetically, ‘I am only repeating Cameron's exact words and am very sorry to pain you by doing so; only you would insist on hearing them, and he never gave me to understand I was not to repeat them.’”

“Judging by physiognomy,” interrupted Solace, “Cameron looks much more likely to commit a theft than Melton. Yet I can not fancy such a knowing fellow would have committed himself by spreading scandals unless he knew that you, Melton, were bound in some way or by some promise that would prevent your vindicating your character in the eyes of the world. However, I am glad now you have heard it all, and I for one will believe your simple denial in preference to Cameron's sneaking lies.”

“Thanks, Solace,” said Hugh, looking up dejectedly, but still proudly, into the young fellow's face. “I think you know me well enough to judge the measure of faith you can attach to such slanders. Circumstances prevent my disproving them as I might do; my denial is all I can give you. To you I am sure it will be all that is necessary; to others I feel it will not be as worthy of belief as Cameron's aspersions.”

“It is enough for me,” said Solace, a nice young fellow whom we both liked; “and I am glad to have your word, though I would have believed you without that. It is a pity you won't disprove them, though; for you know a great many people will try and catch hold of your silence to make the matter worse. Think it over, and see if you can show up his falsehoods. And now, Brabazon, that you have told all about it, and are, I hope, as satisfied as I am, we will go and take a turn on the quarter-deck.”

As their footsteps died away in the distance, and silence fell around us—for there was no one now any where near—I glanced at Hugh to see how he took this fresh evidence of his enemy's untiring, un pitying hate.

His face was buried in his hands, but his hurried breathing showed how keenly he felt the shame of such a charge. I pitied him for his misplaced trust, and though I never doubted his truth, I could see that Cameron had some hold over him that might avail to work his destruction. It was too true what Solace had said; though one or two might and would believe his word, by far the greater number would only exult in his downfall, and point to his silence—springing, I was sure, from some noble cause—as the proof that the accusations of his enemy were true, and he had nothing to answer against them. I waited for a few minutes, and was then about to try some effort at consolation, through hardly knowing what to say, when he looked up, turning his frank, honest eyes on me as he said, “Why, Carnstord, are you still here?”

I knew well what he meant, and why he had not used the familiar name of Charlie, by which he had so long called me. I saw that the iron had entered into his soul; though why he should care about a stigma I felt confident he could remove I could not

“Let me be false in others' eyes, So faithful in my own.”

That is just my case; until he commits some more flagrant offence than inventing slanders about me, my lips are sealed. I see now I made a great mistake, and one that I fear will affect other lives dearer to me than mine; but the die is cast—I must stand by and bide my time in patience.”

His voice shook as he turned away and again paced up and down, a deeper gloom than I had ever before seen there settling down on his once gay and careless face. Then he wheeled round suddenly; a light of determination breaking out over his countenance seemed to transform it into the likeness of one of those warrior angels of whom Raphael and Michael Angelo dreamed, as facing me, he said: “I tell you, whatever he thinks to do—and you say he intends to drive me out of the regiment—I will not go. He may prosecute me by slanderous reports and malicious acts, he may blacken my character and darken my life, he may take friends and acquaintance from me, but he shall not get rid of me till the time during which I must watch him shall expire. Yes, Charlie, even though you were to turn against me—which God forbid!—should still remain—a poor dejected outcast among all my former comrades.”

“But surely,” I answered, “his behavior toward you is quite such as to release you from any promise you may have made him. For my part, though I can't conceive what the secret can be between you two, yet I am sure were I in your place, I should throw honor to the winds, have my revenge on him, and clear myself, as I felt convinced you could do if you chose.”

He signed me to be silent with an impatient gesture. “Hush, for mercy's sake! You don't know how strong the temptation is. Don't add your voice to that of my natural selfish nature, which is urging me to forsake all the principles I have tried to live by, and drives me, with a force I find it almost to resist, to clear myself from this charge, even at the cost of my honor. How long it seems since I have had any rest—harrassed, worried, annoyed on every side—dark looks and innuendoes among my comrades, a perpetual conflict between my heart and my reason—I that used to be so easy-going and light-hearted! I often wonder what will be the end of it!”

“You have truly had a hard time of it,” I answered; “but remember, Hugh, the old proverb, ‘The night is ever darkest before the dawn.’ It is now as dark with you as it well can be; before long you will see light breaking through the clouds. Keep up a bold heart, and don't let your enemy think he has triumphed. I will, now I see his game, keep an eye on him; and if I find an opportunity of defending you and showing him up, depend upon me it shall not escape me.”

“Thanks, dear friend,” he replied, taking my hand again. “I don't know what I should have done without you; already your steadfast faith has comforted me, besides, be the night never so dark, the trial never so bitter, it behooves us to face it like men, with a firm heart and unflinching courage. None but cowards turn from danger; the brave face it the more boldly the greater it appears; I had forgotten that.”

He uttered this more to himself than to me as he sat gazing out over the broad waste of waters.

To be continued.

The Dereham farmer and church deacon who went to Norwich to attend the circus took a good deal of stock in the operations of a sleight-of-hand man, so much so that after hanging around for about three hours concluded to give \$10 for a box in which he saw a \$20 bill put. He got the box, and he is now a poorer man to the tune of \$10. He won't bite again. He soon afterwards started for home. Don't fool around in that way again

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