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McCRUM & DERN.

[INDEPENDENT IN EVERYTHING.]

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"No; the one with the mauve hat and white veil. There, man alive, can't you see? There, just turning round at the end of the walk. Do you see her now?"

"Don't know her at all," said the other.

"Do you, John?" he asked, turning to his cousin.

"Never saw her before," said the cousin. "But she's awfully well."

Then Wood and Andrews strolled up. They asked us the very question we were going to ask them; so we discovered that the young lady was a perfect stranger to us all. Whereupon Lucas undertook to rout her out, as he called it, and tell us—

"I say, Lucas," said Ned, who was rather jealous of the ascendancy Lucas had gained over us in the honor of finding out and becoming acquainted with different young ladies. "I'll bet you anything you will. There, shake hands with her before you will. There, Lucas, my boy, there's a fair bet for you."

"Done," cried Lucas.

Then Wood chimed in—

"So will I, that I'll shake hands before either of you."

And then the rest came forward, each willing to make the same offer.

So the bet was made, and it was about it that I was thinking when old Dan, the boatman, spoke to me.

"Very strange scenes in these boats sometimes," he said, nodding at me over his oars. "They say a London cabman could tell a good deal," he continued, still nodding.

"But, bless you, what can they see or hear? There they sit, fogging their poor horses, while the people are behind them, shut up in a rattling, racking thing. They can't hear, sir. How can they? Now we, you see, Mr. Fred, when we come forward like this, we could almost kiss the people; much more hear what they say."

To prove his assertion, old Dan suited his action to his words, and bent over his oars, leaning forward as far as he could. Having finished his long speech, he nodded again mysteriously, as if to say, "There, I have enlightened you quite enough for one day," and then pulled on again.

As he seemed inclined to be silent, and did not speak, my thoughts gradually reverted to our bet. Lucas had told us that the young lady was Miss Leith, and that the old gentleman was Major Leith, and that they and Mr. Henry Leith were living at No. 6 Marine Gardens. So much information he had gathered from the Cliffgate Chronicle; but that was not an introduction, and he ruefully said to me that he saw no chance of getting one. All his numerous cousins had proved perfectly useless on this occasion. Among us Ned had been the most lucky. Miss Leith had bowed and thanked him when he picked up a book which she dropped upon the parade. I came second. In passing once I was honored with a second look. The rest were nowhere; and just a week had elapsed since we made the bet. Up to the present time Miss Leith had been invincible, though we had all done our utmost to obtain an introduction. Not that any of us cared for the stakes; they were trifling enough; but there was a spirit of emulation at work within us for the honor of the first shake of the hand of the young lady. The more difficult it became, the more eager we all were to win the bet. We had found out that nobody in the town knew her, so we were thrown upon our own resources.

She went down to the beach every morning when it was fine, and walked upon the parade in the afternoon, but was always accompanied by either her father or the young fellow announced in the Chronicle as Mr. Henry Leith. Whether Mr. Henry Leith was her brother or her cousin, and in the latter case her lover, we could not tell out. But we put him down for a brother.

We had told Dan about our bet, and he had promised to help us if he could. That, perhaps, was the chief reason why I seized the opportunity of having him to myself for an hour.

"Seen Miss Leith, Dan?"

The old fellow shook his head.

"I heard she was fond of pulling, though," he said, after a short time.

"Oh! indeed," I answered, as a thought struck me. "I say, Dan, I shall want your boat for two or three hours a day for the next week or so."

Dan had been in the habit of lending me his boat, because he knew that I could pull and manage it properly. I did not anticipate any trouble in getting it, so I was surprised when he appeared to hesitate.

"What are you going to do with it, sir, may I ask?"

"Never you mind, Dan. You lend me the boat. What I do with it is nothing to you; that is, as long as I don't damage it."

"You are right, sir. You shall have it."

He smiled as he spoke, and I could easily see that he guessed for what purpose I wanted the boat. However, he said nothing till the hour was up. Then, as I was getting out, he called me by my name, and said, in a low tone—

"I have known you now for a long time, Mr. Fred. Do mind what you are about, sir. Young women are changeable creatures. I should not like you to be taken in."

His voice was so sad, and his old bronzed face looked so troubled, that I knew he was speaking from experience—perhaps from some bitter lesson he had learned in his youth, and which in some way accounted for the odd name of his boat.

"Come, old Cat," I said, "it is only to win the bet. I am not in love with the young lady. See you to-morrow. Ta-ta."

The next morning, according to our agreement, Dan brought the boat around to the part of the beach nearest to my house. I did not live in the town, but some ten minutes' walk from it, along the cliff; and there was a path from the house, down to the beach. He found me there, dressed in an old boating suit, with my face hid as much as possible by a large slouching hat. I was then twenty-four, but looked a little older, and I meant in this disguise to lay siege to Miss Leith.

"Be careful, Mr. Fred," were the only words he said as we exchanged places.

Then I pulled leisurely to where the visitors generally resorted. How all this would help me to obtain an introduction I was not clear; but I was, to tell the truth, jealous of her having spoken to Ned; and I thought that, at any rate, I should be in my capacity of boatman, to get a word from her. I had also a hazy idea that I might possibly give her hand a little shake as I helped her out of the boat, if ever I were fortunate enough to persuade her to come in. I thought that it would be extremely agreeable to sit opposite to her for an hour, hearing her talk, and also almost near enough to kiss her, as Dan said, whenever I leaned forward.

"Boat, this morning, sir?" I said, as I pulled past the place where Miss Leith and her brother were sitting.

"Not this morning, thank you," he answered.

I had spoken as much like the Cliffgate boatman as I was able. Lucas, too, had heard me, and looked up; but did not seem to recognize either me or my voice, and that emboldened me. When the young lady came down with her Times, and Mr. Leith left them by her morning bath. I saw him plunge in and swim out to sea; and, as I wanted to follow his example, I determined to pull home and change my clothes.

"Well, I will have one more try," I thought, "as I have to pass the Major. Perhaps he may like to go too."

When I came up to him he had put down the paper, and was watching his son through a field-glass. Miss Leith was sitting at his feet, sketching and talking to him.

"I am afraid Harry is going out too far, Helen," I heard him say.

"But he is such a capital swimmer, papa. Where is he now?"

She then closed her sketch-book and stood by his side, looking across the sunny water for her brother.

"There; that little black speck is his head. He is coming back now."

"Oh! what a way he is out. Oh! papa, what is the matter?" she said, as a strong cry from Mr. Leith reached her ears.

"Nothing, nothing. Keep still, girl," he said, beckoning to me.

In a minute he had scrambled into the boat, and we had left the beach.

"Pull, man! He has got the cramp! A hundred pounds if you reach him before he sinks! Harry! Harry!" he bawled out. "Keep up! Oh! my boy, for God's sake, keep up! Pull with your left. Now you are straight. Pull both. Hard!"

I have often rowed in a race, but I never pulled with such will as I did on that day. The boat was the best in Cliffgate, and it seemed to fly over the water as I put all my strength and weight into each stroke. I have just a dim recollection of seeing crowds upon the beach running about, while the major stood in the stern without moving or speaking, watching his sinking son.

"I should like to see you privately to-morrow, sir," I said, putting off the time as long as I could.

"Very well, then. Come in the morning at eleven—No. 6 Marine Gardens. Ask for Major Leith."

I promised to do so, and nothing more was said about it during our pull.

"Good bye," said Mr. Henry Leith, when he was on the beach. "The governor has had all the talk to himself today; but I shall see you again soon."

"Good bye," said Miss Leith, with a nod, as her brother helped her out.

"Good bye."

"I wonder if she will nod and smile," I thought, "when she finds out who I am. I shall be certain to see her again this afternoon at the bank; but she won't know me without this hat. I'll risk it at any rate. What a jolly smile she has!"

Though I did not expect to be recognized, I had, whilst dressing, sundry qualms about going; and when the time came for me to start, I was sitting in the window, still hesitating. I had just decided that I would not go, when Ned walked up the garden and stepped into the room.

"Well, old fellow, you'll be late," he

major in it, glided past almost at arm's length. I made a clutch—a rope was trailing in the water—and as I caught it, and pulled myself with my burden to the side, I heard the shout from the beach, and felt the major's hand unclasping his son's arms from my neck.

"I'll hold him. You get in at the other side. Come, that's well done," he said, as we lifted Mr. Leith into the boat. "Now, you row in, and I'll soon bring him to."

It was not the first time, as I afterwards learned, that the major had helped to resuscitate a half-drowned person. He knew exactly what to do; and, under his skilful treatment, his son opened his eyes before we reached the shore.

"I must dress him before I can convey him home," said the major.

So I took them to the young man's bathing machine, and then pulled away, partly to change my clothes and partly to avoid being known. I succeeded in the latter even better than I had hoped; for, when I met the major and his daughter on the parade in the afternoon, they did not recognize me. I had left my slouching hat at home, and my hair and whiskers were not then plastered to my face with water. I also found out that nobody had noticed me in the morning; so I determined to play on my new character as boatman. Whereupon, the next day, assuming the old disguise, I went forth again in search of fresh adventures.

"Oh! there he is, papa," Miss Leith said, as I passed.

"Ah! so he is. Here, my man, we will go for a pull to-day. How are you this morning? Caught no cold yesterday, I hope?"

"By Jove! I don't know how to thank you," said Mr. Henry Leith, shaking my hand as soon as he was in the boat.

"But I want to have a jaw with you some time."

Then the major, muttering some thanks, held out his hand; and Miss Leith gave me her brightest smile, which I prized more than all.

"How strange, papa," she said, reading the name of the boat. "You know Miss Hemery told us to have this one before we came."

"Bless me, yes. I have heard a great deal about you, Mr. Baker (old Dan). I heard that you were very sober, and very respectable, and all that sort of thing. It seems to me, too; that you were not always a boatman," he said, glancing at my hands, which were rather white than the slippers of the sons of Neptune generally are. "So, if you like to give up this sort of life, why I'll take care that you always have a snug roof over your head."

I thanked him very much; but I told him that I liked my life very well. In fact, I was fairly stumped as to what to say. I felt half inclined to laugh at being taken for old Dan; and yet I felt that the major ought not to be allowed to continue in his mistake.

"You seem rather young to be such a hermit. Come, you must marry. I will find you a wife, and keep her well, too."

"Yes, you must forget the Faithless Maid, now," said Miss Leith, smiling again. I suppose she had heard some of the conjectures about Dan's life.

"I do not mean to be inquisitive," the major said, "but I cannot bear to see a young man like you, and one, too, who is so superior to this sort of work, settling down to such a life. Remember what we owe to you. Will you not tell me your trouble? I may be able to help you; and I swear I won't spare money or trouble to make you happy."

Although, of course, I did not want any pecuniary help, his kind way in offering it, and the fatherly manner in which he put his hand upon my shoulder as I bent forwards, made me ashamed of the trick which I had played upon him. He must sooner or later find it out; and I wondered within myself, as I leaned over the oars, looking down, with his hand upon my shoulder, whether he would then be so kind as now.

"I should like to see you privately to-morrow, sir," I said, putting off the time as long as I could.

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"Well, old fellow, you'll be late," he

said, tapping my knees with his stick. "Don't be so idle. Come along."

"I am not going, Ned."

"Not going! Why not? Miss Leith is sure to be there. Ah! I see. You find it's no good struggling against me. I respect your sense of discrimination; but I can't walk there without somebody. Just come to keep my company."

So I took his arm and we strolled together into the Rose Gardens.

"There's that swell girl I met last night," he said. "Lucas will be at her side in a minute if I don't look out. Ta-ta."

Dropping my arm, he raised his hat to the young lady, and then walked off by her side just as Lucas came up.

"I don't think Miss Leith is here," said Lucas to me; "but there is Letitia Turner at the other end, looking such an awful fright."

Letitia, who was on the wrong side of thirty, honored me, when we met, with a most gracious bow. She certainly did look, as Lucas said, "an awful fright"; and whilst I was admiring the gorgeousness of her "got up," I awkwardly trod upon the dress of a lady who was sitting down.

"I beg your pardon," I said, turning round and raising my hat.

It was Miss Leith; and I saw in a moment, from the blush that colored her cheeks, that I was recognized. It was my voice, I knew, that had betrayed me; but I walked on till I came to the railings that bounded the gardens. There was no gate at the side where I was, or I should have gone out; and the nearest one was exactly opposite the seat which the Leiths occupied. I waited for some minutes looking over the railings, and then turned round. And standing directly in front of me was Major Leith, thus entirely cutting me off all means of retreat.

"How do you do, Mr. Baker?" he said, with a grin, while I felt rather uncomfortable.

Then I stammered out something, apologizing for the deceit I had practised.

"I was going to tell you to-morrow," I said; "but I hope, that you will not think the worse of me for it."

"By my faith, sir, that I won't. I thought, this morning, that you looked a devilish gentleman-like boatman, and said so to my daughter. It is I who have to apologize for calling to you, yesterday, as I did; but I had not time to look at you. I only saw a man in boatman's clothes, and, of course, took you for one. Give me your hand," he said, stretching out his own, and then adding, with a laugh, "though, I suppose, now, you will not want me to put a roof over your head, yet I shall always be heartily glad to see you under mine. By-the-by, as you are no longer Mr. Baker, what name do you mean to assume now?"

"Astley."

"Well, then, Mr. Astley, I hope this will be the beginning of a long friendship."

"I am sure, sir, nothing will give me greater pleasure."

"It was Baker's boat, though, you were in?" he said.

"Yes—The Faithless Maid."

"Then, as I live, Baker shall have the wife and the cottage."

"Then he shall have the cottage without her. He shall have something. I will go and find him now. You come with me and I'll introduce you."

"My daughter, Mr. —, I beg your pardon. I have a shocking memory for names."

"Astley," I suggested.

"Mr. Astley," he said, "the amateur boatman."

"At this we all laughed, and Miss Leith blushed. Then the major, with a hearty farewell, left us and went on his errand.

"I caught him," he said, when he returned. "He has consented, after a slight skirmish, to live with me, and have a place to harbor his old hulk in. We must go now, Helen. Private, to-morrow at eleven, eh, Mr. Astley? Well, I hope I shall see you soon."

"Thank you, major. Good bye, Miss Leith."

"Good bye, Mr. Astley," she said, putting out her hand.

Lucas and Ned