

Dudley's Fusiliers

For Empire And Honor
Book One



HAROLD R. THOMPSON

He heard the steady thunder of controlled cannon fire.

The injured man howled with each jolt from the moving horse, his right leg nothing but a meaty stump, oozing blood.

Dudley felt his cheeks drain at the sight. He thought, *There, now I have seen the ugly face of battle, and it is nothing like seeing a sick man, even one who dies.*

He drew in a long breath, closing his eyes. The shock of seeing the wounded man passed.

He carried on in his search for stragglers. Now and then he glanced forward, toward the pounding of the distant guns. He hoped to catch a glimpse of what was happening.

That glimpse came when the army crested a low ridge. A wide river valley lay below. Moving across that flat, dead ground was the force that the Hussars and Artillery had encountered—columns of gray and brown Russian infantry, retiring south, away from the advancing British.

“My God,” Dudley said.

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CHAPTER ONE

When I was a youngster gossips would say
When I grew older I'd be a soldier.
Rattles and toys I threw them away
Except a drum and a sabre.

T. S. Cooke
"Hey For the Life of a Soldier"

It was October 14, a month after Wellington's death. William Dudley finished his breakfast, put on his best frock coat, and tramped downstairs to the main door. After stepping into the yard, he paused for a moment under the sign that read "Black Horse Tavern and Inn."

A recruiting sergeant stood near the gate, haranguing a small group of village lads with his parade-square bellow. The sight of the sergeant made Dudley think of Wellington's passing, of how the nation had mourned. He recalled a snatch of verse and hummed to himself:

Come all ye valiant soldiers
And listen unto me,
Who has got an inclination
To face your enemy.
Never be fainthearted
But boldly cross the main,

Come and join Lord Wellington
Who drubbed the French in Spain.

The words belonged to one of the many soldiers' songs Dudley had learned as a boy. The men of the Royal Hampshire Fusiliers had often sung the song as they marched through the village, trailing barking dogs and excited children. Dudley had always followed close behind the regiment, marching as far as his short legs could carry him.

The recruiting sergeant spoke of Wellington now, attempting to entice the young men to enlist to honour the memory of the Iron Duke. Dudley approached the group and stopped to listen. He felt the force of the words. They stirred the old dream, his passion from boyhood, to "go for a soldier."

With some effort, he turned away from the sergeant and walked out of the yard. Following his usual route, he made his way through the village and toward Highwood Hall. He tried to forget what the sergeant had said. Someday soon, if circumstances allowed, he was to go away to Cambridge. The life of a soldier would never be for him.

Dudley gazed through the library window and waited for the arrival of his single pupil, young Jeremy Wilkes. As was his habit, Dudley had come to Highwood Hall early to enjoy a few moments of solitude. The library, with its shelves of leather- and cloth-bound books, was a welcome escape from the room he rented on the third floor of the Black Horse. At the inn, the constant noise from the taproom downstairs created an impression of perpetual company. Dudley enjoyed the presence of others, but he also relished silence, the chance to be alone with his thoughts and imaginings.

Today those thoughts kept returning to Wellington. The old general had died on September 14.

Dudley reached into the pocket of his frock coat and drew forth his constant companion and good-luck talisman. He turned it in his hand—a small tin soldier, the last survivor of a box of twelve. Dudley had named it after the hero of the Peninsula and Waterloo.

“Well, Wellington,” he said to the soldier, “though your namesake has passed on, you’re still here. Even after I’ve lost Bonaparte, and Meaney, and Sergeant MacDougal, and all the rest of your tin compatriots.”

Dudley smiled at the recollection of those bygone imaginary friends. His father had given him the box of toy soldiers, a Christmas gift purchased in London.

The smile faded. Memories of the toy soldiers could be both pleasant and painful. The gift, though a gesture of caring, was the last such gesture. After that, the elder Dudley had forgotten his son, and had fallen into drink and despair.

Dudley’s mother had died when he was an infant, her body yielding to a consumption of the lungs after a long struggle. For two years, his father had managed to cope with the loss, and Dudley had never known that something was amiss with his remaining parent.

But the coping had been an illusion, and the elder Dudley had begun to spend most of his time in local taverns. Neglected, little William had retreated into a private world, inventing fantasies based on the adventures of the toy soldiers. The true exploits of Britain’s troops in the long wars against the French had provided the basis for those adventures. Dudley’s fascination with the army had begun.

Then Dudley’s father, in a drunken stupor, had toppled into the Test River and drowned in its shallow waters. This second tragedy had led to the release of seven-year-old William Dudley into the care of an uncle and aunt, the Reverend and Mrs. Robert Mason.

Reverend Mason managed a small public school in northern Hampshire. Dudley had attended that school until he was twelve years old. The reverend had then seen to the remainder of his nephew’s education—and the education of Dudley’s five cousins—personally. Reverend Mason had also obtained for Dudley the position of tutor to the young son of Mr. George Wilkes, the master of Highwood Hall. At Highwood, Dudley taught his pupil a full range of subjects, including mathematics, physical science, French, Latin, geography and, his personal favorite, history.

Perhaps a history lesson, Dudley thought, would serve to combat his growing ill mood. To indulge himself in one of his enthusiasms, with Jeremy as a subject, might raise his sinking spirits.

When Jeremy entered the room, Dudley had just finished planning the lesson in his mind.

"Good day, sir," greeted the small boy, bobbing his curly head.

"Good day to you, Jeremy," Dudley replied. "I have a treat for you today. I know that in history we have been learning about the Greeks and Romans, but I thought that we should look at some of the history of Britain." He paused, then asked, "Do you know who the Duke of Wellington was?"

Jeremy grinned, for he knew the answer. "He was a famous soldier, sir. You were fond of him."

Dudley returned the boy's smile. Already his gloom was lifting.

"Yes, I was. But did you know that he first became famous in India? You know where that is. Please go to the globe and show me."

In the afternoon, when the lessons had ended and the autumn sunlight spilled through the windows to pool on the carpet, Jeremy's oldest sister, Martha, came into the library. This was part of a daily ritual. When Jeremy departed, Martha came to take his place, though not as a pupil.

Dudley stood as she entered, and said, "Good afternoon, Martha."

She smirked at him. "Good afternoon? This is all the greeting I receive after all this time?"

"Forgive me. You make me feel quite humble. I'm almost afraid to ask if you would care to walk in the garden, while it's still light."

Their walks in the garden were another part of the ritual. Sometimes they even ventured past the garden, down to the brook with its stone bridge, or into the lane beyond. Today, they halted on the bridge beneath the golden beeches, elms and oaks. Dudley leaned on the railing, staring at the flat-flowing water.

Martha stood beside him, and he studied her reflection next to his. *How lovely she is*, he thought.

Their courtship had begun a week after Dudley's arrival at Highwood. Martha, it seemed, had taken to his good humour, while he had felt an instant attraction to her liveliness, her elfin beauty.

"We shall have the whole winter together," her reflection appeared to say, "and the spring and summer as well, if you do not go off to Cambridge until next Michaelmas. Almost a whole year!"

Dudley followed a yellowed leaf as it spiraled toward the water. His mood seemed to fall with it, threatening a return to his earlier state. Why should that be? he wondered. He knew the reason the moment the question entered his mind—Martha's mention of Cambridge.

"I don't really want to go," he said, thinking aloud.

Martha took his arm. "Oh, you are in a funny mood today, aren't you? It has always been your aim to go to Cambridge, your dream to study the law."

"That is not my dream, it is simply a plan. When my education is complete, an acquaintance of uncle's—a barrister—has agreed to take me on as his articled clerk." He sighed. "Another one of my uncle's plans for my future."

Martha turned from him and strolled along the bridge.

"You're frightfully gloomy today. I don't care to see you like this."

He watched her move away from him into the shaded lane. He had let his renewed melancholy show. That was unfortunate, for he could never explain to her why he felt this way.

How could he tell her that Cambridge held no interest for him? That he wished to pursue his childhood dream of leading men into the glory of battle? A foolish dream, for he could not afford the price of an officer's commission. His uncle had agreed to pay part of his fee for attending college but would never agree to his entering the army. And Martha would never agree to his enlistment in the ranks. Respectable men like him did not do such things.

His dreams must remain dreams, childish fantasies that had grown from his play with tin soldiers.

"I'm sorry, Martha," he called, catching up to her with a few long strides. "I don't to spoil our afternoon."

She halted under the oaks that bordered the lane and fixed him with her brown eyes. He stopped beside her.

"You're not spoiling our afternoon," she whispered, and he noticed how close to her he had come. He hesitated, then reached for her tiny hand and took it in his.

"You may kiss me if you like," she said. "If we are ever to be married, we must not be afraid of each other."

Dudley's heart quickened. He could feel the warmth of Martha's body where it pressed against him. Even through her thick dress and his woolen coat, he could sense her warmth. When he kissed her, he could not believe the softness, the sweetness of her lips.

When they parted a moment later, she repeated, "We shall have almost an entire year before you leave."

Dudley dismissed his inner protests of a moment ago. For this, he thought, he could forget his old dreams, take the respectable path to Cambridge, enter the Bar or even run for Parliament. For her he would do anything.



Autumn passed into winter, and little changed. Every day Dudley made his way from the Black Horse to Highwood Hall. There, he gave little Jeremy his lessons then spent time with Martha. On Sundays, he joined the Wilkes family for dinner, and these affairs became the high points of the season.

On one Sunday in February, Dudley was not the only guest at Highwood. Martha's cousin Edwin had arrived with a friend, a Lieutenant Jonathan Sackville of the 33rd Regiment. Edwin and Sackville would be staying the night, then resuming their journey to London in the morning.

Dudley looked forward to discussing matters of war with the young army officer. Over dinner, he asked him what he thought of Russia's apparent designs on Turkey and the Balkans. The lieutenant's response was disappointing. He explained that

he knew little of Russia or the looming crisis with Turkey, and refused to discuss any other military subject. Instead, he described his father's racehorses, directing his conversation at Martha. He aimed a question at Dudley only once, saying, "Is it true, Mr. Dudley, if I may be so bold, that you are an orphan?"

"That is true, Lieutenant," Dudley said. "My mother died before I had the opportunity to know her, and my father drowned when I was seven years old."

"Ah, now, that's hard. Truly hard, sir, to grow up in such a state." He nodded with affected sympathy.

"On the contrary," Dudley returned, "my later childhood was far from dreary, for my mother's brother and sister-in-law took me in. Though my uncle can be stern and aloof, my aunt is a warm and maternal woman. I made many friends at my uncle's school, and my cousins are a lively crowd. I never wanted for affection and companionship amongst them."

"Ah, that's good to hear. There's so much misery in the world, such a story warms the heart."

Sackville's condescension was blatant, but Dudley did his best to hide his disgust. He glanced at Martha to judge her response. She was staring at the young officer. Staring, it appeared, with admiration. Surprised, Dudley turned his attention back to his food. Perhaps he had imagined it.

But as the dinner wore on, he decided that his original interpretation had been correct. Sackville monopolized Martha's conversation, and Martha returned the attention, absorbing every word the fellow said and laughing at his weak attempts at wit.

Dudley's ears began to burn with jealousy, and his head filled with questions and suspicions. He became deaf to the talk around him, and only awakened when someone mentioned the Duke of Wellington's recent death.

"Always an admirer!" Sackville declared. Dudley bristled to see that the fellow again directed his exclamation at Martha, who smiled as if to say *Bravo, Lieutenant!*

"Always!" the young officer repeated. "You know, Waterloo and all that. Our regiment's named for him, and I believe that he even commanded it once."

"I have always thought his greatest success," Dudley interjected, "was at Assaye, in eighteen-oh-three. He also considered it the best thing he had done in battle. A victory against such overwhelming numbers says great things for both the general and the common British soldier, I would say."

"Ah, yes, quite," Sackville replied. He cleared his throat. "I'm afraid, however, that I know very little about that engagement."

There was a moment of silence, a moment of satisfaction for Dudley. He spied Martha grinning at him, beaming with unabashed affection. With that, he felt a burst of triumph, and knew he had achieved a small victory. Martha must have been humouring the young officer all along. There had never been a reason for Dudley to feel jealous.

He went home that night ashamed of his suspicions. He resolved never to mention them to Martha.

Spring approached, and with it the promise of things to come, good and bad. Dudley tried to enjoy the routine of his days, though nervous thoughts of his future were never far away. He waited for word from Cambridge.

It seemed he was always waiting for something. During his childhood he had waited to become a man, passing the time in play and games. In play, he had escaped from the hopelessness of his father's home. In play, he had found a happy existence with his cousins and at his uncle's school. He had never bothered to plan, to take action, to consider the course of his life. He had come to rely on his uncle for that.

Now, he waited for Cambridge and the end of his term as tutor. The former was beyond his control, while the latter would come in July.

Then, in June, an unforeseen event occurred. Edwin Wilkes and his friend Lieutenant Sackville returned to Highwood Hall. They each brought several pieces of luggage, for George Wilkes had invited them to stay for an unspecified number of weeks.

To his shame, Dudley found that this situation made him nervous. The jealousy of that first meeting with Sackville re-

turned. He hated the thought of Martha living under the same roof as the fellow.

He never mentioned his fears to Martha, but she must have sensed them. She made a point to convince him that she disliked Sackville, thought him foolish, a fop. He pretended to believe her, and almost convinced himself that he did.

On a morning in late July, a drum rattled outside Dudley's open window. He washed, dressed, ate his breakfast downstairs, then hurried into the yard. There, he found the drummer. The recruiting party, the same one from almost a year ago, had returned to entice young labourers and ploughmen to enlist.

Though tempted, Dudley could not linger to hear the recruiting sergeant's discourse. Instead, he began his usual journey to Highwood. Jeremy's lessons had ended a week previous, but Dudley had received two letters that he wanted Martha to see. They had arrived in yesterday's mail and now lay folded in his coat pocket alongside the tin form of Wellington.

The letters had come from his Uncle Robert. One was official notification of his acceptance into the undergraduate programme at St. John's College, Cambridge. The other was congratulations and promises of monetary aid. Martha would be pleased.

Yes, Martha would be pleased. Dudley himself was indifferent to these prospects, to the thought of a university education. His pleasure would lie in Martha's reaction. As he walked up the long drive to Highwood's front door, he anticipated hers expression when he showed her the letters.

The maid let him in but had disappointing news. Martha was not there.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Dudley," the maid said. "She went for a walk in the garden with the young Mr. Sackville."

"Thank you," he said.

He moved past the maid and walked through the house toward the back entrance. It was strange that Martha would go out with Sackville.

Dudley wandered into the garden to look for her. He clutched his uncle's letters in his right hand. Against his will, old suspicions began to form in his mind. Jealous suspicions. He told

himself there was no need for them, that Martha barely tolerated Sackville. She was probably just being polite in spending time with him.

He could not find her in the garden. He made his way toward the brook. She was not on the bridge. He crossed over into the lane.

In a shaded nook beside the lane, he came upon Martha and Sackville. Martha and Sackville, arms encircling each other.

For a moment, Dudley did not understand what he was seeing. Then Martha noticed him, gasped, and leapt back behind her uniformed companion. Sackville glanced up, and his face split into a sheepish grin.

"Rather embarrassing, I'm afraid," the officer said, chuckling.

Dudley could not speak. He felt a constriction in his chest. His jealousy was justified after all. Martha's professed devotion to him was false, maybe always had been.

"You lied to me," he said to her.

Sackville frowned. "See here, what's this all about?"

"Couldn't keep your hands off her, eh, Sackville?" Dudley snapped, temper flaring. He took a step forward.

Sackville's face reddened. "I don't care for your tone of voice, sir."

Dudley ignored him and advanced on Martha, thrusting his uncle's letters out to her.

"I was going to Cambridge, Martha. Here is my acceptance!" Crumpling the letters, he cast them at her feet. Martha recoiled from him, tears rolling down her stricken face.

He felt a hand on his chest. The hand pushed hard, shoving him backward. Close to his ear, Sackville murmured, "Stay back, old boy."

Dudley reacted without thinking. His left fist smashed deep into Sackville's middle, then his right struck the officer full in the face. Sackville stumbled backward. His legs became entangled in his sword, and he toppled into the brush.

He did not wait to see what Sackville would do. Turning on his heels, he strode back the way he had come, along the lane

and across the bridge. Martha called after him, but Dudley did not look back.

Sackville did not give chase. Martha may have held him back. Dudley assumed she had still meant to marry him, keeping her little fling secret. Such a marriage was impossible now. He was alone and betrayed.

As Highwood Hall receded behind him, he asked himself, *What am I to do now?*

When he reached the Black Horse, he found the answer waiting.

The sign showed a black horse rising on its hind legs. Beneath the signpost was the recruiting sergeant, a drummer boy on his right, a corporal and two privates on his left. They all wore elaborate uniforms, though none looked as splendid as the sergeant. The sergeant wore a scarlet double-breasted coatee, and a slung brass-hilted sword hung at his side. Perched on his head was a round forage cap with no peak, and attached to the cap was a little cockade of bright ribbons that fluttered in the breeze.

The sergeant stood on a crate above a small crowd of village and country lads, offering a description of military life. He emphasized its good pay, attractive uniforms, the ample pension on discharge, and spoke of the glory and horrors of war. Dudley joined the audience and felt almost drunk on the decision he was about to make. He hung on the sergeant's words, knowing that much of what the man said was exaggeration but not caring.

"I want able-bodied men of fine limb and martial aspect," the sergeant announced, "from five feet eight upwards, and not over thirty years of age. All must be of good character and free from any disease, blemish, or impediment. They must be fit to dig trenches and throw up breastworks, to work at a fortress, or haul big guns into position. They must have the courage to mount the scaling ladders and charge through a breach when storming a fort or citadel. They must be able to fight single-handed with the Indians, or capture the sword of the czar or the Great Mogul himself when so commanded.

"I want no lubbers, mind, but gallant fellows with strength, heroic minds and endurance, ready to volunteer for the greatest

danger. Lads who will go anywhere, to freeze to death in Siberia, or to simmer on the burning sands of Arabia.”

The sergeant smiled under his neat mustache, and his merry eyes twinkled as he described these adventures. Adventures, hardships and glory, just as Dudley had imagined in his boyhood games with Wellington and his tin comrades.

“Now, boys,” the recruiting sergeant continued, “who’ll enlist for this and a great deal more? You’ll get double pay, double clothing, tools for nothing, superior bedding of long feathers, three square meals a day and two holidays a week. The army will teach you everything you need to know, such as how to turn properly on your heels and toes and to stand as stiff as starch. We’ll teach you all the useful marches—the goose step, the balance step, the side step, the quick step and the slow step. We’ll teach you how to step before the commanding officer if you misbehave, and how to step into the black hole if you don’t act as a soldier and a gentleman should.”

With this last, he stood even taller and straighter, and his comrades, including the drummer boy, all frowned and nodded to each other.

“Now, boys,” the sergeant said, “I am ready to enlist as many of you as want to join, and treat you as gentlemen. There is no compulsion. You must all be free and willing. Remember that the regiment I am enlisting for is among the bravest and most honourable in the Service, with the best officers in the British Army. Why, did you know that the Royal Hampshire Fusiliers—or the Royal Hants, as we all like to call ourselves—fought the French in Spain? That they charged the breach at Badajoz, and stood with Lord Wellington at Salamanca, Vittoria, and then at Waterloo? It’s a long history of guts and glory you’ll be inheriting, and I can’t help but give three cheers for it! Hip-hip...”

“Hurrah! Hurrah!” the corporal and privates cried. Those gathered, Dudley included, could not help getting caught up in the spirit, and all cried the last “Hurrah!” together.

“And God Bless Her Majesty, Queen Victoria,” the sergeant added, stepping down from his crate. “Anyone who wishes

to take her sacred shilling, follow me into the Black Horse. There I have a table prepared and a few mugs for those interested."

Inside the taproom, the sergeant moved to a table under a window and sat. His uniformed companions stood behind him. From a valise, he took a sheet of paper, an ink bottle and a pen.

A few of the country lads had the courage to venture inside, but they hung back, undecided. One, a chubby fellow with a bit of drool dribbling down his chin, turned to Dudley and said, "I always fancied I'd make a good soldier. But what would my ol' ma say to that?"

Dudley did not reply. He thought of Martha, conjured an image of her smile, her eyes, her hair, her lips. The pain that stabbed through his heart seemed to propel him forward, toward the sergeant.

"Sergeant," he said, "I want to enlist in the Royal Hants."

The sergeant grinned at him and exclaimed, "Bravo! You are just the young lad I want! Upon my reputation, there is not a gentleman in the three kingdoms does me greater honour than yourself by selecting the Royal Hants for your career. And you're obviously an educated fellow. I have no doubt you will attain the highest rung in the ladder of promotion, or the highest rung on the scaling ladder."

The sergeant told Dudley to sign his name on the form on the table. Then he rose to his feet and said solemnly, "Hold out your right hand and answer me this: are you free, willing and able to serve Her Majesty Queen Victoria, her heirs and successors, for a period of twenty-one years, or until your legal discharge?"

Dudley took one deep breath, let it out, and said, "I am."

With that, the sergeant placed something cool in Dudley's hand, saying, "I give you this in the name of the queen. You are now bound to her service."

Dudley looked at his hand, saw the significant shilling. He did not know what to say or think. He had at last made an active move toward his future, but had turned his back on the life that he knew. Turned his back on his uncle, on Cambridge, on Martha.

“Wake up, lad,” the sergeant cried, chuckling and clapping Dudley on the back, “though I know it’s hard not to be in awe. After all, you’re a soldier now!”

Four others enlisted in Dudley’s wake. The sergeant then led his catch into a back room where an army doctor waited to approve their physical appearance. As the examinations were taking place, Dudley experienced a moment of panic. What had he done? This was nothing but a fantasy, and he had just enlisted for twenty-one years! And in the ranks!

But it was too late for second thoughts. The Queen’s shilling was in his pocket, jingling against the tin form of Wellington. He had chosen his life, and now he would have to live it. As a soldier:



The next morning at ten o’clock, the sergeant took his five recruits before a magistrate and had them sworn in. The recruits then had the remainder of the day to themselves to pack what they thought they would need and to sever whatever ties they had to their old life. Tomorrow, they would leave for the regimental depot in Fairbridge.

Dudley felt a mixture of excitement and dread. The excitement was at the prospect of grand adventures like those he had always wished for. Then he would remember Martha, and his spirits would plummet. She had driven him to service in the ranks. Dread would set upon him at the thought of those twenty-one years—twenty-one years of possible hardship and deprivation. Life could be cruel for a private soldier.

Yet it was not fair to blame his decision on Martha. He had enlisted as an escape. An escape from the pain of his discovery of her and Sackville. An escape from a path in life that he had never wanted to follow in the first place. Martha, by her betrayal, had not driven him to anything. Her actions had instead removed her from the original portrait of his future, and without her, that portrait was lifeless. There had been no other option but to pursue his dream.

In his room at the Black Horse, he examined his reflection in the mirror. A young man of nineteen, just over five feet, eight

inches tall, with a slight build, thick blond hair, a boyish face—perhaps too boyish to be handsome. What kind of a soldier would he make?

“A damn good one,” he stated.

That was his goal. He would be as good a soldier as he could.

Though, with that determination, he was left wondering just what he meant. What elements were necessary for being a good soldier? He considered the regiments he had seen marching through the village, or parading on the green, drums beating and bands playing. Regiments of steady men, moving as one when called to, their clothes and accoutrements gleaming just as the recruiting sergeant’s had. To Dudley, they had looked like good soldiers. Men who knew their drill, who knew their duty, who understood discipline, who would uphold the values of Great Britain. Men who had reason to feel pride in what they did.

Then there were the many stories he had read and heard. Tales of great feats of arms from before Wellington’s day and later. Tales of the soldier’s loyalty to his sovereign and comrades, his sense of honour, his fighting spirit. Dudley had recently met an officer at the Black Horse who had told such tales.

The man had described the events of the Afghan revolt of a decade ago. The 44th Regiment had stood alone at Gandamak, surrounded by crazed rebels, fighting on to the last man. The courage of soldiers who could do such a thing—fight on without hope of rescue—had made an impression on Dudley. In his judgment, there was considerable glory in such a defeat. Those soldiers had retained their dignity, remembered their training, and had not given up.

“If I ever have to confront death or defeat,” he said as he faced his reflection, “I hope I shall confront it as those men did—unflinching.”

Perhaps he did not understand what he was saying. His notions of soldiering were, after all, mostly the gatherings of a child. It was possible he did not have the faintest idea as to what made a good soldier.

Well, that was of no consequence, he decided. He would soon learn.

He bid goodbye to his friends and acquaintances at the Black Horse. It had not taken long for the news to spread that William Dudley, former tutor to Highwood Hall, had enlisted in the army. Everyone was curious about that remarkable decision, and Dudley explained that he had always wanted to be a soldier. Some responded with encouragement, while others did not know what to make of it. A few thought he had made an absurd mistake. These last Dudley did his best to ignore or forgive. He did not need to be told he had been foolhardy.

Later in the evening, he returned to his room and packed a few belongings in a shoulder bag—books, stockings, an extra blanket, his toilet case. He did not need much, for the army would provide him with the essentials. When he had finished, he looked over the room in which he would sleep one last time.

There was no need to be sentimental, for he had been at the Black Horse for a scant fourteen months. It seemed like no time at all since his arrival last summer. He remembered the excitement of that event, of leaving the home he had come to know and venturing out into the world. Or so he had seen it at the time. The fact was, he had only moved a few miles away, had not even left the county.

To become a tutor, of course, had been his uncle's suggestion. A suggestion after the fact, since his uncle had made the appointment without consultation. He had told Dudley after the arrangements had been concluded.

Uncle Robert was an imposing figure, with the inherent strength of the preacher-turned-schoolmaster. He was confident, authoritative, a man who believed he knew what was best for others. He believed in punishing those who did not live up to their potential, but he was not a cruel man. He believed in the purity of the human soul. He displayed kindness to those who worked to better themselves in a manner congruent with his conceptions.

Dudley remembered the interview in his uncle's darkened study. A heavy spring rain had been drumming a constant tattoo

on the roof and windows. He had entered the study not knowing what he was about to hear.

Uncle Robert had sat in his leather chair, the air about his head thick with tobacco smoke from his heavy mahogany pipe. He had worn the tiniest hint of a smile on his thin lips.

“Sit, my boy,” he had commanded and, as Dudley had taken the other leather chair, added, “though perhaps I should not call you ‘my boy,’ anymore. You’re a young man now, William. You’re eighteen. It is time that you embarked on a career of your own.”

Always uncomfortable with this subject, Dudley had forced a smile and had replied, “I believe so, sir.” In fact, he had felt it was past time.

“Yes, it is high time,” his uncle had continued. “In light of this fact, I have secured for you a very respectable position with a Mr. Wilkes, an old friend of mine from my own school days. You shall be tutor to his young son, Master Jeremy. The term shall begin in September.”

This had been a startling announcement, though Dudley’s surprise had not been without joy.

“Thank you, Uncle Robert. That is...stupendous news!”

His uncle’s face had glowed with pleasure at that response. “I am glad that you think so. The position is for one year. Now, we have spoken of Cambridge, and I shall work towards securing you a placement there. We have also spoken of pursuing the law, and we shall continue with that possibility. But after Cambridge we shall see what really strikes your fancy, hmm?”

This had been his way of telling Dudley he was free to choose his own life after all.

“Perhaps the bar will suit you, or perhaps the clergy. At any rate, we shall see. We shall see.”

Dudley had liked that last statement. *We shall see*. First, he would have a year of employment, followed by a lifetime of possibilities.

The day of departure had arrived a few weeks after the meeting in the study. Dudley packed his trunk, arranged to have a few pieces of furniture sent on after him, then said his fare-

wells. His aunt hugged him long and hard, just as she had embraced her eldest sons when they had left home. He shook his uncle's hand. His favourite cousin, Jane, kissed him and wished him good luck.

Then he and his trunk piled into a chaise that was attached to an aged pony and driven by the son of a local farmer. The pony strained and moved forward, and the chaise began to roll up the lane. Dudley's family stood waving as if he were going off to sea, or to India or some other distant colony.

He had shared that sense of great adventure, if only because this was a new experience. There had also been the added fascination, both wicked and thrilling, of living over a public house. That his uncle would ever suggest such an arrangement seemed incredible.

But the Black Horse had not proven to be so wicked after all. It was just the center where the villagers gathered to gossip, and a depot for the Royal Mail. He had even discovered that he enjoyed a pint of something before going to bed.

All in all, not much had changed from his life at home. He had not even had to prepare his meals, for the landlady usually provided that service. In fact, life became less exciting than before, for he missed his old friends and his relatives. Meeting Martha had been the only genuine adventure of his tutorship.

Now that his position had ended, maybe it was appropriate that his association with Martha should have ended as well, though it would not be so easy to forget her, to forget the dominant factor in his recent life.

He tried to keep his mind on other subjects, and concentrated on the task of storing whatever items of clothing he would no longer need, putting them away in his trunk. But Martha stayed with him. He could not help reliving his most prized moments with her, torturing himself with the memory.

There was a sharp rapping on the door, bringing him back to the present. He crossed the floor and undid the latch, expecting the landlady with his dinner. He instead found himself face-to-face with Martha, as if she had emerged from his imagination.

For a moment, he wanted to slam the door, but the impulse quickly passed. In his indignation, he did not want to talk to her but knew it was good she had come. If she had not, his last memory of her would have been of the episode with Sackville. After their time together, such an abrupt finish would never have satisfied him. There needed to be explanations on both sides.

“Good evening, Martha,” he said.

“Is it true?” she asked, incredulous. “You’ve enlisted in the army?”

“Yes, I have. I have joined the Royal Hampshire Fusiliers, one of the finest regiments in the service.”

“But how could you do such a thing? *Why* would you do such a thing?”

“Why would I do such a thing?” he cried. “How can you ask such a question after what you have done. After betraying me?”

“Betraying you? But it was innocent,” she insisted, wringing her hands. “Simply an innocent display of affection...I...I don’t know why...”

Tears welled in her eyes, and Dudley felt his anger diminish, his heart softening. He opened the door wider, beckoning her inside and showing her to a chair. He closed the door and sat at his writing desk.

“So, your rendezvous was innocent,” he said. “Very well. I will attempt to be calm and reasonable and not put this in the worst possible terms. Those terms being that you would marry me, yet continue to have little trysts behind my back. Use me, in other words, for whatever purpose, though such a purpose eludes me right now.

“What I will say is this simple truth, which is enough to end our presumed engagement—I am not as important to you as I thought I was, and I cannot marry someone who will not give me that devotion.” He paused, then added, “What man would, under the circumstances?”

“But it was not how it must have seemed to you,” she replied. “You must allow me to explain myself. I was confused—Jonathan said so many confusing things. It was simply a mistake.”

"No explanation you can offer will excuse your actions, and that is that."

Martha bit her lip and would not meet his eye. "So, you will never forgive me?"

"Would you forgive *me*?" She did not answer that, so he said, "At any rate, nothing can be changed now. Don't you understand that? I've been uncertain all my life about what I want to do, and now I'm doing something. I've taken the Queen's shilling. My decision cannot be rescinded."

He studied her face, her exquisite face, her mouth drawn down in anguish. Perhaps her distress was every bit as great as his. He knew that, in the days to come, he would long for her, and that was dreadful to contemplate. He could not bear to lose her, but it was too late. She did not understand the finality of what he had done.

He leaned forward and took her hand, whispering, "I'm to go away, and not just to Cambridge. I could very well be posted as far away as Africa, or India."

"But I love you," she insisted.

He squeezed her warm flesh, remembering that day when they had kissed. He remembered it with regret and sorrow. He would never have that with her again.

"Maybe you do love me, in an odd sort of way," he said. How could she possibly expect him to forgive her? "I don't know. But things can't be how we thought they would be. That's a simple fact."

"Then it's goodbye," Martha whispered.

"Yes," he answered, standing. He looked down at her and said, "Goodbye, Martha."

She said nothing more. Composing herself, she rose from her chair, moved to the door and left.

Dudley watched her from his window, saw her climb into the gig that waited in the yard. He watched as it began to move, bumping away toward her home.

When the gig had disappeared, a wave of anger more intense than he had ever known washed over him. He wanted to scream, to smash the window, tear the bed apart, splinter his

desk and chairs into kindling. Pounding his fists on the desktop, he told himself he could not have controlled what had happened. He could not change the course of events. And why should he really want to?

When the anger subsided, he slumped in his chair. He realized there was another painful task that had to be completed before the morning. He had arranged to have his few furnishings transported back to his uncle's house. He would have to write a letter to go with them.

Taking his pen, he dipped it in ink and collected his thoughts. "My Dear Sir," he wrote. "It is with great pleasure that I write to you with my news, though it is also with great misgivings. I fear that my motivation in this matter may not be readily comprehensible, that my judgment may be called into question."

He sighed and set down his pen. He could think of no possible way to help his uncle understand his actions.

"Uncle will never understand what I have done," he muttered. "Though he will have to accept it."

He snatched up his pen and finished the letter.

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