

Guns of Sevastopol

Empire And Honor
Book Two



HAROLD R. THOMPSON



GUNS OF SEVASTOPOL

Empire and Honor 2



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GUNS OF SEVASTOPOL

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Dedication

This edition is for Ben and Maddy

CHAPTER 1

March 1855

Ensign William Dudley stepped through a side door of the colossal Barracks Hospital. The March sun bathed him in its rich light, and he drew in a deep breath. Winter was over, and the air smelled of spring, a season that came early to the Turkish empire. It was now almost as warm as a summer day in Hampshire, his native county in England.

He clapped a wide-brimmed straw hat onto his blond and curly hair. As he adjusted the hat, he studied a batch of feathery clouds hanging low in the north. Somewhere beneath those clouds, a war was raging. The British army would be preparing a new offensive, and Dudley would join it just in time. In four days, he would return to the front, to the ongoing siege of Sevastopol, a siege that was five months old now.

Four days. Four days before he returned to the blood and carnage, the mud and the sleepless nights, and the endless crashing of the guns.

The prospect should have disturbed him, but it did not. He wanted to rejoin his men, and it would be a relief to leave

Scutari, to be free of the Barracks Hospital. So grand from a distance, the cavernous building had meant certain death for many a wounded man. For Dudley, it had meant sickness and misery. He would not miss it. There was only one thing about Scutari he would be sad to leave.

Movement caught his eye, and he turned to see a young woman approaching from his left. Quickly snatching off his straw hat, he said, "Good morning, Miss Montague."

The nurse who had saved him returned his greeting with a suppressed smile.

"Good morning, Ensign Dudley," she said. She did not pause to chat but continued on her way, following the perimeter of the huge building.

Dudley watched her, fingering his hat.



A hired caique took Dudley across the smooth surface of the Bosphorus Strait. Other caiques plied the water, their slender hulls gliding between the pleasure yachts, fishing boats, and larger European vessels.

A trio of British men-of-war were on his left, solid and dominating where they lay at anchor. White birds swooped into the tangle of masts and spars, soaring and diving but never coming to rest. The French called the birds *corps damné*, for the Turks believed them to be the souls of unfaithful wives, condemned to perpetual motion for their sins. Angry husbands often bound such women into sacks and cast them into the strait to drown. To the Turks, it was reasonable to assume that the unworthy souls of those women would remain here in some form.

This was one of the strange customs that made Dudley uneasy about his hosts. He considered many of their practices barbaric. He knew the pain of a woman's betrayal, but he would never have considered murder. Yet in this country, such murders were legal.

Turkey was a paradox, a land of both great beauty and great ugliness. Sometimes it was difficult to say which was which. Constantinople was a fine example of such ambiguity. From the Bosphorus, the tin plating covering the roofs in Stamboul, the Muslim part of the city, shone in the sun like silver. Distance made Constantinople a place of glistening magic. But upon closer inspection, one found houses that had not seen repairs in centuries, their walls chipped and crumbling. The streets were narrow and filthy, the broken pavement covered in rubbish and excrement. Through this streamed a constant and choking traffic—masses of pedestrians, donkeys with filled panniers, porters shouldering enormous burdens, and the occasional horse and carriage. Everywhere conversation, arguments, and music weighted the air.

The Turkish capital had not impressed Dudley on his first visit, but since then he had grown accustomed to its shabbiness and stink. Now it fascinated him. Constantinople was different from home. At once it was a sort of novelty but also a place of many fascinating layers. The city's three main districts—the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian—each contained a distinct collection of colourful citizens. There was always something to draw one's attention.

It was to the inner city he went once ashore. His aim was to browse one of the many markets to find gifts to send to his family. He wanted something for his aunt, his cousin Jane, and even for his uncle. He had searched for such gifts before but had never been able to make up his mind. Now that this was his last chance, he would seek out some of his earlier choices and at last commit to a few purchases.

The bazaar was crowded and noisy, and Dudley kept a firm grip on his purse as he pushed through the throng. He passed stalls selling fanciful glazed pottery, dishes in hammered brass or tin, Persian rugs, Kashmiri and Turkish shawls. Many stalls displayed weapons—muskets, swords, pistols and

daggers, some inlaid with gold, silver or ivory, or studded with precious stones. Dudley wished he could buy a sword, but he saw nothing at a price that he could afford.

He came upon a vendor offering ladies' slippers at reasonable prices, the cloth embroidered in gold or silver thread. After much consideration, he chose a red pair for Jane and a dark-green pair for his aunt. The slippers would not be very practical in the old Georgian parsonage in Hampshire, but he knew Jane, in particular, would appreciate their delicate beauty.

For his uncle, Dudley searched the collections of pipes, which ranged from common clay to gold- or silver-mounted Turkish hookah. Tobacco was one of his uncle's few vices, and he chose a pipe with a bowl carved in the likeness of an aged monarch, his crown inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Perhaps his uncle would think it too fine, but there was no sense in sending him something plain. A gift from a foreign land had to bear some signature of that land.

With his packages under his arm, Dudley glanced at the sun and estimated the time as close to eleven o'clock. There was no sense in returning to Scutari at such an early hour. He *decided* instead to make his way to one of the city's most visited attractions, the famed Great Mosque of St. Sophia.

The nephew of an Anglican clergyman, he knew little of the Muslim faith. His one observation was that it seemed a religion that knew the power of a grand setting. He had always felt closer to God while fishing in a stream or wandering an open field than in church; church was a place for lessons and sermons. Yet the great mosque did inspire an other-worldly awe with its huge central dome and four corner minarets. Dudley found it more impressive than the cathedrals at Winchester and Salisbury. He did not mind one final visit, if for no other reason than to remind himself he was somewhere famous and exotic. The Turks encouraged visitors, even the heathen British.

An attendant greeted him at the door and reminded him to remove his shoes. When Dudley did so, the attendant offered a pair of slippers. Dudley glanced at the slippers and tried to keep his nose from wrinkling. He doubted they had ever been washed, despite the untold number of feet they had undoubtedly known.

“No, thank you,” he said, smiling. “I’ll go in my stockings.”

“I may hold your shoes for you, sir, if you like,” the attendant suggested.

Dudley had polished his boots so they shone like dark mirrors, and he did not feel comfortable leaving them with the attendants.

“Thank you, but I will carry them. It’s no trouble at all.”

The attendant bowed, and Dudley stepped through into the huge domed cavern, his boots in one hand and his straw hat in the other, his packages wedged under one arm.

As always, the sight of so much gold in one place took his breath away. The dome seemed to glow with its own radiance. Its rounded walls rose in three levels, two with columned galleries, the third with arched windows that let in the unlight. Below, on the floor to one side, an enormous book, perhaps the Koran, sat on a carved wooden rest. There were no seats or pews, for the faithful knelt on little carpets they brought with them. Over time, their weight had pressed the bare earthen floor as hard and flat as paving stone.

Dudley grinned at the sight of the worshipers, for between the carpets and their occupants strolled visiting British officers, all in stockings. Some of the officers wore scarlet uniforms and others blue. Each carried his forage cap in one hand and his polished boots in the other.

As he studied this curious scene, he caught the eye of a pair of officers in blue hussar uniforms, their jackets looped with gold. As they approached, one of them ran his eyes over Dudley’s own threadbare uniform. Frowning, the officer glanced

at his companion. Once they had passed, Dudley heard the fellow declare, "It's as I said—the army is going downhill with all this talk of reform. They'll let any ragamuffin in now that it's wartime."

Dudley felt his ears begin to burn, quick anger rising. The man had meant for him to hear the comment. He turned to look as the two fancy hussars moved farther away.

Like most of the officers in the mosque, the hussars appeared to be recent arrivals in Constantinople, part of a contingent of reinforcements. They had seen no fighting yet. Dudley resisted an urge to race after them and demand, "Where have you been in the last five months while better men have been dying in the mud?"

But he knew there was no sense in that. He did not want to cause a fuss in here, and he would only make enemies if he started a quarrel. Perhaps he would ruin his reputation as an officer before he even got started.

He glanced at his sleeve, at the gleaming brass buttons on his cuff. Those buttons should have been gold. He had done his best to keep himself looking smart, brushing his coat and Oxford mixture trousers until they were spotless. There was only so much he could do. The fact remained that his uniform was incorrect for a man of his rank. So many things about him, as an ensign, were incorrect.

He was not a *proper* officer, after all.



From boyhood, William Dudley had wanted to be a soldier. Perhaps all boys wish that at some point, but Dudley was more passionate than most. That passion had begun, as far as he could remember, when he was six years old and his father had brought him a gift from London. The gift had been a box of tin soldiers, and it had been magic, an antidote for his childhood loneliness. His mother had died when he was four,

and after that his father had spent much of his time in the local tavern. Dudley had retreated into his imagination, a place where his best friends were tin soldiers, childish twins to his heroes from the long wars with Napoleon.

The greatest of those heroes was the Duke of Wellington, and little Dudley had named one of the tin soldiers “Wellington” in his honor. That soldier still survived. Attached to a slim length of chain around Dudley’s neck, it hung inside his uniform coat as a charm of good luck.

When Dudley was seven years old, his father had toppled from a bridge in a drunken stupor and drowned. Little Master William had gone to live in the house of his uncle and aunt, the Reverend Robert and Mrs. Bronwyn Mason. There, he had enjoyed the company of his five cousins—four boys and one girl.

Uncle Robert was, to use his own word, an “educator.” He wrote books and pamphlets on many subjects and managed a country boarding school attached to his church. Dudley had attended that school before completing his education at home under the private tutorship of both uncle and aunt. He had a sharp mind, and there had been talk of his attending university, something only one of his cousins had done.

Uncle Robert was a fair yet dominating man, sometimes severe in his opinions and notions of what was good for others. He had begun to believe it would be William Dudley’s destiny to go away to Cambridge, as he had done himself.

Dudley had been in no position to refuse, although he had been unable to rejoice. His real interests lay far away from the little town of Cambridge. He wanted to follow in the footsteps of soldiers like Clive and Wellington, men who strove to uphold British justice in faraway lands like Spain and India. But he could never have explained that to his uncle. *Foolish dreams*, his uncle would have said. *Boyhood nonsense*.

The sensible part of Dudley’s character had agreed, but his soul had rebelled.

Uncle Robert had done his best to help Dudley towards a sensible career. He had used his connections to find him a post as a tutor then had secured for him a place at St. John's College in Cambridge. All had been going as planned.

But the Reverend Mason had not counted on the presence of Martha Wilkes, the elder sister of Dudley's one pupil. Dudley had found something special in Martha, and she had returned his affections. They had even begun to discuss marriage. Then had come that terrible and momentous day, perhaps the defining day in his life. He had come upon Martha in the garden...in the arms of another man.

Dudley had thrown all caution and sense to the winds. Without Martha, his uncle's plans for him had seemed stale and hopeless. There had been nothing left but to follow his dream to become a soldier. And since he could not afford a commission—and his uncle would never have agreed to buy one for him—he had enlisted in the ranks.

It had been a rash move, and a betrayal of his family's wishes. It had wounded them all, but it had wounded his uncle the most. Dudley's aunt and cousin Jane still sent him letters, but for almost two years, Uncle Robert had refused to acknowledge that he had a nephew. In recent months, he had begun to refer to Dudley at last, but only as "that boy." That was a start on the healing road, but Dudley still considered himself an outcast. His new family was his regiment, the Royal Hampshire Fusiliers.

As it turned out, he had discovered he had a knack for military life. He had set about doing his best to master his drill and all aspects of the army's rather erratic protocol. In this he had discovered the advantage of his decent education, which led both to the label of "gentleman ranker" and an early promotion to corporal.

Then the war with Russia had come. Russia, the most powerful nation in Europe since Napoleon's defeat, had invaded the

Turkish empire. Britain and France, unexpected allies, had responded with outrage. Britain feared the Russian threat to both the Mediterranean and their passage to India, while France feared Russian expansion. The two nations had decided the Bear must be stopped.

Maintaining the pretense of helping “poor little Turkey,” the allied armies of Britain and France had invaded the Crimean peninsula. Their objective was to destroy the important Black Sea naval base of Sevastopol.

For Dudley, the war began as a glorious adventure. Everything had changed in the terrible battle at the Alma River. He had received a field promotion to sergeant but had lost one of his closest comrades in murderous fire that left the dead strewn about the heights above the river. He had begun to worry that all of his romantic notions of soldiering were false. He had seen men blown to pieces before his eyes.

After that, he became obsessed with regaining his notions of glorious conquest, of triumph over an immoral enemy. In the muck of the growing siege trenches before Sevastopol, he began to convince himself that nothing had changed. The sight of the dead ceased to bother him as much as it had. When the Russians made a major push to destroy the British Army, Dudley had distinguished himself by leading his company against a field battery. That battle was now called Inkerman, and in its wake, Her Majesty Queen Victoria had issued a Royal Warrant authorizing the promotion of one sergeant from every regiment involved. Dudley had been the sergeant chosen from the Royal Hampshire Fusiliers.

He still wore his sergeant’s double-breasted coatee, although he had made some modifications. He had removed the white lace chevrons and attached a worn and used pair of bullion epaulettes to his shoulder straps. Around his waist, he wore his sergeant’s sash, and he had no sword. The army would give him an allowance of 150 pounds to purchase proper

uniforms, but he did not think there was any sense in having them made here in Turkey. He loved fine uniforms, but once he returned to the Crimea, the harsh environment of war would not be kind to new clothing. It was better that he keep his makeshift rig for now.

But that makeshift rig had drawn the disapproval of the two hussars. Maybe they knew of the Royal Warrant and suspected that Dudley was one of its beneficiaries. Their attitude reminded him of the struggle for acceptance he was about to face.

The army believed that an officer should come from that class of men who owned property in Britain. Dudley's family had no land and no titles, and his uncle was nothing but a perpetual curate. Dudley was respectable and educated, but simple respectability did not matter a fig to most army officers. For them, blood and heritage were everything.

Most officers purchased their commissions. Under this practice, fools and incompetents with large pocketbooks could rise to the rank of general if they so wished. The danger was well-known, but men of great influence had and still defended the purchase system. The most famous defender was Dudley's hero, the late Duke of Wellington.

Wellington had believed that British army officers were the best in the world for one reason—they were gentlemen, born to owning land and thus born to lead. Keeping the price of a commission high was the only means by which men of inferior class could be kept out. If one had to contend with a few fools, so be it. As for the few promoted from the ranks, they were unfortunates. They had just joined a class in which they could never live up to expectations or the style of living.

All of this added to Dudley's predicament. Not only was he not a proper gentleman, and thus an inferior, but he had no money. An officer in the infantry required sixty to a hundred pounds a year of independent income. Dudley's new rate of

pay was a minute four shillings and sixpence a day. That was about three times what he had made as a sergeant but was still not much, considering everything an officer needed to pay for. In the Crimea, an officer needed a horse, a saddle, a pack-saddle, horse accouterments, and a groom or servant. He would also have to pay a mess subscription when the war ended, as well as band subscriptions, subscriptions for theatricals and other social events. That was the stuff of an officer's life.

Dudley still had most of the salary he had earned as a tutor, which amounted to almost forty pounds. It would keep him going for now, but it would not last forever. In order to become a successful officer, he would have to find some source of income.

The extravagance of the Great Mosque suddenly seemed to emphasize his poverty. He looked again at the great dome, but the charm of this final visit was gone. With a sigh, he turned and began to wander back toward the door.

He tried to recall the names of the officers surviving in his regiment. He had never had much to do with any save his old company commander, a fellow who had lost a leg at Inkerman and was no longer serving. Dudley would have to get to know the others and adopt their habits to win their acceptance. Maybe his merit as a soldier would also help. He had risen in the ranks as a result of that merit. There was no sense in changing his philosophy now.

But he feared he would first have to endure many more insults like the one he had received today, here in this golden mosque.



Another day passed, bringing Dudley's return to the war that much nearer. He spent an afternoon sitting under the awning of a bell tent composing a letter to his cousin Jane. The tent was one of many on the hospital grounds, shelter for patients

who no longer required beds. He had the tent to himself, which made it the most spacious lodgings he had occupied since joining the army.

A wooden crate served as his desk, a creaking camp stool his chair. At his feet lay a pile of old newspapers, their contents serving to jog his memory of the past months.

“The wound in my leg that I took at Inkerman,” he wrote, “is almost completely healed, as is the subsequent ailment that seized my stomach and intestines. It is good to feel myself again, and as I sift through the reports from the front, I feel I am fortunate for having spent the winter here.”

Doubtless you have read William Russell’s pieces in the *Times*, describing what our troops in the field have been suffering. Most Army officials dislike Mister Russell, while our Commander-in-Chief, Lord Raglan, thinks it a disgrace that the Army’s doings should be reported in the papers. I for one am thankful for the reports, and trust their accuracy. They match the many tales told to me by the sick and wounded who have arrived here over the course of the winter.

Taken together, Russell’s reports are so bleak that my own experience seems trifling. The Barracks Hospital is far from a paradise, my dear Jane, but it is better than what my comrades have endured before Sevastopol. It is even possible that my second illness ultimately saved me, for it kept me here in Turkey for an extra month.

However, I don’t want to burden you with tales of starving men, dressed in rags, standing up to their knees in snow. You must

think that I take a perverse delight in recounting things evil, I do it so often. Perhaps there is some truth in that. I have felt great rage in the face of the mistakes and neglect, but I have come to accept the horrors of battle and war in general. Or I think I have come to accept them, and learned to see the good that may come of them.

A bad circumstance, my dear Jane, is sometimes the best in which to foster gallantry and heroism. These are not mere words. I believe in them now more than I ever have.

For balance, and for your peace of mind, you must remember that our foes seem to have suffered as badly as our lads. An undeclared truce held throughout the winter, perhaps because of the lack of ammunition supplies. Now that spring is near, the trench skirmishing has begun again. Fresh wounded come to the hospital every few days, though our fellows have fought no new battles yet. Perhaps one last push will make the enemy give in.

“Yes, one last push will do it,” he said to himself.

This was a reasonable prediction, for the Russians now faced a far superior force. According to the most recent issue of the *Times*, the French army in the Crimea had received reinforcements. They now stood at almost thrice the British strength and occupied both the extreme left and extreme right of the siege lines. The British remained in the center. Piedmont was also getting into the fray, having declared war on Russia on January 26. They would soon be sending troops.

“I have heard the news of Lord Aberdeen’s resignation,” Dudley wrote.

This gives me a certain amount of satisfaction. After all, it was Russell’s reports of the bad conditions that forced the fall of the government. How does Uncle feel about Lord Palmerston becoming the new prime minister? The man seems eager to reform the army administration, which is a good sign. Another good sign is his strong talk of the successful prosecution of the war.

We all thought something might happen when Czar Nicholas died a few weeks ago. They say that the new Czar, Alexander II, is a moderate. There was some fear that peace would come early, before we had finished our task in the Crimea. I dearly wish for peace, Jane, for this has dragged on too long, but I must be back with my regiment before that happens, and we must have something to show for it. Peace now, before we obtain our objective, would make a mockery of all we have suffered.”

“Peace,” he repeated aloud.

For a moment, he imagined the green meadows near his home in England, and the beautiful open downs he had so loved as a child. He wondered when he would see them again.

“Peace yourself, sir,” said a nearby voice.

Dudley glanced up from his letter to see a gray-haired private approaching. It was Daniel Oakes, a member of his company.

Oakes touched his battered forage cap with his right hand in salute. The hand shaded his one good eye. A patch of black cloth covered his empty left socket.

“Private Oakes!” Dudley exclaimed. He set down his pen and stood, returning the private’s salute. He had learned much from this grizzled veteran.

Oakes was at least fifty years old, although no one knew his exact age. He had never pursued nor accepted promotion but had remained a stabilizing force within the company, sharing the simple wisdom of an experienced campaigner.

“What news?” Dudley asked with a broad grin.

Oakes hesitated. “Bad, sir.”

Dudley’s smile faded. His friend did not look his customary cheerful self. He still wore a tattered uniform, his red coat patched in many places with pieces of gray wool blanket. This was also strange. Oakes had come to Scutari because of wounds taken at Inkerman, but he had left the hospital weeks ago. Since then, he had been living in the camp outside Constantinople with other recovering members of the Royal Hampshire Fusiliers. That camp was bursting with new supplies.

Dudley asked, “You have still not been issued with new kit?”

The old private’s one eye blinked.

“Well, it’s like this, Mister Dudley. I’m to be discharged, sir.”

“It’s as we feared, then.”

This was, indeed, bad news, although no surprise. He and Oakes had both fretted over the possibility for weeks. Dudley had tried to reassure his friend that the army would find a place for him, for Oakes was a good, steady man. Yet he had not really believed his own reassurances. The simple fact was that enlisted men had to be sound in mind *and* body. An offi-

cer could continue to serve without an eye—or an arm, as in the case of Lord Raglan—but not a private soldier.

Oakes sat on another crate next to Dudley's makeshift desk.

"What am I to do now, sir?" he asked, voice hollow. The army was everything to him, and now he was about to lose it.

"Well, you will have your pension," Dudley began, but he knew that was cold comfort. A soldier could never have lived even on his full regular pay if not for the food, clothing and shelter the army provided.

"Me pension," Oakes echoed. "Aye, there's that." He paused then added, "Perhaps it would 'ave been better that I'd died then, at the Barrier."

"Your wife doesn't think so," Dudley stated. Hester Oakes was the unofficial matron of Dudley's company.

"How shall I support her now?" Oakes asked.

Dudley could think of no other encouragement, so said nothing. In response to his silence, Oakes stood, face reddening.

"My apologies, sir. I never came to see you to bother ye with this. I just wanted to tell someone, that's all. Thought you should know, after all we'd talked about."

"It's all right, Oakes, I'm glad you told me. I wish there were something I could do."

He knew Oakes could still do his duty, one-eyed or not. He had been, and could still be, a good soldier. Now, without the army, he faced the possibility of life as a beggar.

"I'll try to think of something, Private," he at last promised. "Never you fear."

Oakes had regained his composure. His pride took over, and he declared, "That's all right, Mister Dudley. Hester and me'll be fine, you'll see. It's just a bit of a shock, that's all."

"Yes," Dudley agreed, "it is."



Private Oakes's situation remained foremost in Dudley's mind, but he tried to set it aside on his last day in Scutari. He did not want to spend his final hours here worrying about something he could not change. There was another matter more pressing.

Returning to his old ward, he moved along the aisle between the packed ranks of sick and wounded. The cots lay closer together than those in a barrack room, but every man had a shelf for his belongings. The ward smelled of soap and disinfectant, and the men, with their clean, fresh bandages, lacked for nothing. This efficiency was thanks to Miss Nightingale, the superintendent of female nurses, and her assistants. Assistants like Elizabeth Montague.

Elizabeth stood at the far end of the ward, bending over a wounded man who had just arrived. Dudley stopped and watched her for a moment.

He considered the horrible state of things before the arrival of the nurses. The patients themselves had never complained, but every able-bodied man had feared a wound more than death on the battlefield. The reputation of military hospitals had seen to that. Now, things were changing. There had never been a military hospital like this one.

The changes had begun with William Russell's articles in the *Times*. The Secretary-at-War in London, Sir Sidney Herbert, had read those articles and decided something must be done. He had then written to Florence Nightingale.

The men of the army worshiped Miss Nightingale, and knew her story well. She had been born to a well-placed Derbyshire family and had lived an active and frivolous social life. She could have continued in her place of privilege to the end of her days, but something in her heart had rebelled. While she had been living so well, the poor had suffered in the streets of the factory cities. To help correct the imbalance, she had decided to become a nurse.

The decision had horrified her family, but they could not dissuade her. She became devoted to her goal, her dream. Dudley could understand that.

Miss Nightingale had soon discovered there was no one to educate her in her chosen profession. Undaunted, she had studied on her own. She had consulted the great medical minds of Europe and had visited hospitals in Germany, Ireland, and France. By the time Sir Sidney decided to consult her, she had become a recognized expert on nursing and hospital management.

Upon her arrival in Scutari, she and her picked assistants had encountered the travesty known as the Barracks Hospital. There had been no furniture in the cavernous building, not even a single operating table. A sewer blockage had caused noxious gases to fill the wards. The various departments in charge had, in their squabbling, neglected everything, left everything undone, each pointing at the other. The blocked lavatories had leaked excrement into the halls. The muddy central courtyard had become a dumping ground for rubbish, animal corpses, and overflowing privies. The water supply, located in that same courtyard, was contaminated.

The Superintendent of Nurses had wanted to begin reforms at once, but prejudice had barred her way. Many of the army surgeons and physicians, although understaffed and overworked, had resented the presence of women. For most of her first month, Miss Nightingale found her services unwanted, and she could do nothing without official permission.

She could have given up, sat idle, but had instead persisted in an unofficial capacity. Her nurses had helped to feed and clean men who could not do so themselves, and had prepared bandages.

Then the wounded from Inkerman began to arrive, and everything had changed. The new wounded had crammed the wards to five times their capacity, men lying on the floors

without clothing, shoes, or blankets. The few available surgeons had worked with their sleeves rolled up, covered in blood to their necks. Injured and sick men had called out for help that had not been available. The doctors had soon discovered the work was too much for them. At last they had called in Miss Nightingale's party.

At once she made an inventory of supplies. She found there were twenty chamber pots for every thousand patients. There were no drugs, no pillows, no washbasins or towels, and no combs or brushes. There had not even been a screen to hide the horror of surgery from those who waited to go under the knife.

With money from a fund created by the *Times*, Miss Nightingale had set about acquiring the necessary supplies. By December, she had cleaned and equipped ten experimental wards and had begun work on other sections of the hospital. That work continued still, but the bulk of the task was complete.

Before the arrival of the nurses, almost half those who entered the Barracks Hospital had died. The death rate had since dropped to a handful, and those were men with serious wounds who would not have survived under the best of conditions.

There remained a few who believed an army hospital was no place for women, but the majority had nothing but admiration for Miss Nightingale. She and her nurses often worked around the clock, and would never leave the side of a dying man until he had expired. They made attempts to appear drab and unattractive, but nothing could mask their beauty. The men called them "Angels of Mercy." Many a wounded soldier fell in love.

And then there was Elizabeth Montague.

Dudley wished he could have spent more time with her. Circumstances had not allowed for that, of course. It would

have been scandalous for her to neglect her other patients for him.

As it was, he was uncertain about the nature of his attraction. It could not be love, for he did not really know her. It might have been simple gratitude, coupled with fascination. He had often wondered why this young woman would have left her comfortable home to come to this hell. She must be a cold machine, he had decided once, driven by duty more than true caring. He had noted her ability to control her emotions, to keep her face locked in an expressionless mask in the face of so much sickness and injury.

Yet in time, he had recognized a warm and cheerful disposition behind that mask, a caring soul. He supposed she must need to retain firm control over her behaviour in the company of so many men. Glimpses of her soul broke through now and then, in involuntary flashes she quickly hid. A tenderness toward a patient, or anguish when a man died. Best of all, Dudley had discovered he could make her smile and even laugh—sometimes, it seemed, against her better judgment.

He would miss her presence, her reassuring nearness that told him all was well. He would have to content himself with this last glimpse, although he hoped to see her again someday, when the war was over. Then, he would take the opportunity to learn whether his feelings could become deeper, and whether she truly had any feelings for him.

When she left her patient, he moved toward her and said, "Good morning, Miss Montague."

"Good morning, Ensign Dudley," she returned, stopping before him. "How may I be of service?"

"There is something I would like to ask you. I don't want to be in your way here, but I know that you're still very much overworked. I will be leaving tomorrow, and was wondering if perhaps there is any way I can be of help. To repay some of your kindness?"

She gave him a steady look, yet there was curiosity in her eyes. Her blue eyes.

He knew every aspect of her face. That face was perhaps too thin to be beautiful, although there were charming dimples at the corners of her mouth. The dimples were evidence that she smiled and laughed a great deal when she was not hiding behind firm efficiency. And her blond hair had a habit of coming undone, with small strands dangling over her smooth forehead.

“Help, Mr. Dudley?” she said. “Why, you’re barely out of your sickbed yourself.”

“But my strength is almost fully returned, thanks to your suggestion of taking walks every day.”

She frowned, and he felt the beginning of disappointment. He did not want her to refuse him, and that was a possibility. Many recovered soldiers helped with the running of the hospital, but Elizabeth had a tendency to reject personal offers. Dudley had seen her reject help even when she could have used it.

Once, she had been struggling with a large load of blankets, yet she would allow no able-bodied man to intervene. It was a stubborn sense of honour Dudley admired, although he hoped she would make an exception in his case. Not because he was an officer, but because he was a friend.

His hopes were answered, for she at last said, “Your help would be appreciated, Ensign. Very much, to be truthful. I still have several serious cases to attend to, and there are bandages that need rolling. I was uncertain when I would find the time.”

Dudley bowed. “Then I shall roll bandages for the rest of the day.”

She showed him what to do, and he sat down to his task. He did not mind the tedium. When he had enlisted, an aged staff sergeant had told him to always help out when he could. If he did so, the old sergeant had insisted, he would go far in

his chosen profession. Dudley did his best to follow that advice.

He worked in silence, but as time passed, his satisfaction gradually gave way to frustration. He found his mind wandering back to the problem of Private Oakes. It seemed absurd that he could help his nurse but could do nothing for one of his closest comrades.

Later in the afternoon, Elizabeth returned to collect some of the bandages for use. Dudley was no longer as cheerful as before, although he brightened when Elizabeth saw all he had done and praised his efforts.

“The men are always eager to help,” she said, “although when other officers wish to contribute to the administration of the hospital they send their servants.”

Then she smiled at him, her lips forming their graceful curve. Dudley tried not to stare at that smile, but in its warmth he realized something he been a fool to not realize before.

A servant! An officer’s servant could remain with the battalion, and it did not matter whether the fellow had two eyes or not.

“Why are you laughing, Ensign?” Elizabeth asked, still smiling, although looking a bit perplexed.

“Because, Miss Montague,” he replied, “I have just found a way to save a friend.”

CHAPTER 2

March 23, 1855

Dudley shared a longboat with a detachment of the 68th Regiment. He watched the shore as the boat slid between the high bluffs flanking the harbor. The mid-morning sun lit the bare rock and cliffs of the western bluff, while on the eastern side the broken towers of an ancient Genoese castle stood in stark silhouette.

The village of Balaclava lay at the far end of the inlet, invisible for the crush of anchored naval vessels and transports. As Dudley's boat drew closer in, that tangle of masts and spars parted like prickly curtains. The houses at last came into view, a collection of plastered cottages and warehouses with clay tile roofs. Beyond the village, the ground sloped upward to meet the wide plateau of the Chersonese Uplands.

The boat came to a halt against a low wooden wharf. As the only officer present, Dudley was the first to disembark. The men of the 68th followed, filing past to form in line with another detachment that had come ashore before them. Dudley stayed on the wharf and waited for Oakes and his wife, still on the water in a second boat.

From the north came a dull thumping of guns. He listened, and a shiver ran along his spine. He had forgotten the unsettling impact of that sound.

He tried to ignore the cannon fire and studied the crowded waterfront. Rows of prefabricated wooden storage huts lined the quay, and at their feet sat piles of crates, barrels, and canvas sacks. A single railroad track ran along the shore and turned north to follow the road out of the village. The locomotive was not present, but a steady traffic of wagons, oxcarts, mules, and horses moved in and out of the supply base. No evidence remained of the harsh winter he had read and heard about. In fact, things seemed in a much better state than they had been last autumn.

When Oakes and his wife finally landed, Dudley said to them, "Things have changed here."

The first thing Oakes noticed was the railway.

"That they have, sir."

"Do you think we could ride on the train?" Hester Oakes wondered.

They waited, but the train did not appear. They decided to walk, trailing the marching files of the 68th out of the village and towards the camps.

A mile from Balaclava, they came to the smaller village of Kadikoi. There they at last found a locomotive and two cars. Smoke drifted from the engine's funnel, but the train had halted for a small herd of cattle blocking the tracks. The train drivers, an incongruous group of sailors, tried to clear passage, pushing and prodding the lumbering animals.

The two railcars were filled with shot and shell. Dudley wondered if the railway extended all the way to the batteries, but when he and his companions reached the far side of the village, they came upon an ammunition depot. Great piles of round shot and cylindrical shells lay beside the road. The railway ended at that spot. Stacks of wooden ties and steel rails suggested the tracks were still under construction.

Here, the supply road turned left, north toward the British camps. Dudley's camp was another four miles away. As part of Sir George Brown's Light Division, the Royal Hampshire Fusiliers held a position near the far right of the British lines. It was a fair walk, and Dudley convinced the driver of an ox-drawn wagon to allow Hester Oakes to ride on top of his load of biscuit barrels. There she sat with her carpet bag in her lap as the cart bumped along the rutted supply road. Dudley and her husband continued on foot. To them this was a familiar route, for they had travelled it many times last year when bringing up supplies.

Dudley welcomed the walk as a chance to keep warm, for the air held a damp chill. He shivered under his new wool greatcoat, and his toes ached within his knee-high winter boots. After Scutari, this came as a shock to his body; winter was not finished with the Crimea.

The French soldiers he saw stood huddled in their wool overcoats, kakis pulled down low over their foreheads. Many of the civilians wore furs, while the breath of men and animals alike came in puffs of steam.

Dudley thrust his hands deep into his pockets and gazed around at the barren plateau. Everywhere lay scattered rock and dull brown grass, gullies and deep ravines running at right angles to the coastline. A few trees had grown here, stands of slender cypress and scrub oaks, but they were now gone to feed the campfires.

Unlike Balaclava, with its abundant supplies, the signs of recent hardship were numerous in this region. The bones of animals, including a few complete skeletons, littered the bare ground. Here and there lay discarded bits of uniforms and equipment, broken wagons, crates, barrels, and ration tins. Much of the rubbish was half-buried in dry earth that had once been soupy mud.

“Looks like someone’s been fighting a war,” Oakes remarked.

When they reached the first of the British camps with its ordered tent streets, they encountered soldiers who were as shabby as the land. Save for their rifles and accoutrements, the men resembled bundled civilians. Most of them wore knee-high or thigh-length boots with mittens of colored yarn or sheepskin protecting their hands. Some had retained their standard gray greatcoats, but most seemed to prefer a fur-lined hooded cloak or a sheepskin coat. They wore the sheepskins with the wool on the inside, and many had painted strange fanciful devices, such as leaf and flower patterns, on the leather.

Save for their swords, revolvers, and dirty sashes, it was impossible to distinguish the officers from the men. For Dudley, this discovery came as a relief. He was one of thousands of dilapidated men, no matter what the two fancy hussars in Constantinople may have thought.

The last of the British camps was that of the Light Division, and there the journey ended. Oakes helped Hester down from the wagon while Dudley studied the perfect rows of conical tents. It was as if he had never left. Everything in this place was exactly as he remembered it, with the addition of a few prefabricated wooden huts.

But his sense of nostalgia was short-lived. As he and his companions strolled along the streets, he saw one unfamiliar face after another. Once he had known almost every man in the regiment, at least by sight, and many from his brigade. Many of those men were now gone.

“I suppose I shall have to report to Lieutenant-Colonel Freemantle,” he said. He found the presence of so many strangers disorienting, and wondered if anyone was even aware he was coming back.

“As your servant, then, sir,” Oakes said, “I shall go and see if I can’t find out about our accommodation.”

“Oh, yes,” Dudley agreed. “I guess that would be the right thing to do.”

Hester Oakes snorted.

“Fine army this is. No one here to greet us. Typical!”

“Ain’t it, though?” her husband agreed.

They moved off together. Dudley stood in the street, trying to remember the location of his commanding officer’s tent. It was then he finally spied a familiar figure coming towards him—Private Brian Barker.

Barker was a huge man with shaggy black hair and sunken, sinister eyes. When he saw Dudley, a wide grin split his bearded face.

“Welcome back, sir!” he cried, striding forward and giving Dudley a smart salute.

Dudley hesitated before returning the compliment. He had mixed feelings about this man, although he appreciated the friendly greeting.

“How are you, Private...” he began, and then his eyes widened in surprise. He had made a mistake. Barker wore a red sash around his waist, and there were three white lace chevrons on the upper right sleeve of his heavy coat. He was not *Private* Barker at all.

“Sergeant Barker?” Dudley said.

Barker shrugged.

“Amusing, ain’t it?”

Dudley shook his head.

“Amusing if you have a black sense of humour.”

Barker had been the most troublesome man in No. 3 Company. He might even have been the most troublesome man in the regiment. He had provoked the other men, been insubordinate to his NCOs, and had delighted in aggressive or cruel practical jokes. For all that, more than half the men

of the company had followed him, either out of fear or respect. Barker knew how to rally others, and he knew how to intimidate.

He had been a problem for Dudley from their first meeting, but Dudley had refused to play his game or submit to his bullying. In slow increments, he had won Barker's respect and then his support. At Inkerman, Barker had been the first to follow Dudley when he took command of the company.

He had eventually discovered the reason for Barker's poor behavior: Barker had been a sergeant before, with dreams of reaching sergeant-major. His dreams had ended when a pair of lieutenants, men Barker had never named, ordered him to spy on another officer. The lieutenants had also expected the sergeant to plant incriminating evidence in the officer's quarters.

Barker had considered himself a man of honour, and had refused. Soon after that, he found himself on report time and again for the most trivial acts. At last, trumped-up charges of neglect of duty had led to his demotion to private, as well as the demotion of his closest friend, another sergeant. After that, Barker had lost his respect for the institution he had joined, the British Army.

Then came the war with Russia. Barker had found it difficult to maintain his bitter act when his comrades had need of his support. The bloody fighting and misery of the first months in the Crimea had pulled those men who survived closer together. Barker's conduct had improved.

Considering that improvement, Dudley thought, it was not so surprising Barker had managed to gain back his old rank.

"I suppose the company was in desperate need of NCOs?" Dudley suggested.

"That they were, sir," Barker replied. "In fact, after *you* were evacuated, there weren't any at all. A lieutenant was trans-

ferred from another company to make up our lack of officers, and they looked about to make a new sergeant. I had the experience. And since I'd taken part in your mad charge to take that battery, I got the promotion. So, I suppose I have you to thank."

Dudley smirked. "Forgive me if I doubt your sincerity, Sergeant."

He started to walk. He was still not ready to believe Barker wanted to be his friend.

"I'm hurt, sir, truly I am," Barker cried in mock indignation. He scurried to catch up as Dudley moved away.

"As long as you're following me, Sergeant," Dudley said, "maybe you can tell me what has happened in my absence. We seem to have received reinforcements."

"That we have, Mister Dudley, though a few of the old lads are still around. O'Ryan's back and promoted to colour-sergeant. We also got new rifles, an improvement on the Minié. The new Enfield, sir—five-seventy-seven calibre and a pound or two lighter. Very accurate, if I do say so myself. Oh, and all the boys threw away their shakos about a month or two back. Dumped them at the bottom of a mud-filled ravine. And good riddance."

"No doubt the quartermaster was happy with that," Dudley commented. "How was the winter? As bad as the reports?"

Barker uttered a sharp laugh.

"I'm sure it was worse, sir. The problem was that bloody supply road, which, as you know, sir, isn't a road at all. When the autumn rains came, it turned into stew, and the wagons couldn't move. Stores piled up on the docks in Balaclava, but there was no way to get 'em to the camps. We starved, sir. When the cold weather set in, the mud froze and the road was serviceable again, but by then things had slipped pretty far." Barker's jaunty tone changed, growing somber. "We had a poor bastard so frostbitten that, when we tried to take off his

stockings, his toenails and half his toes came with 'em. There were plenty of cases like that. And horses standing around in the snow like bags of bones, eating each other's tails.

"Rain, sleet and snow every other day, the damned trenches knee-deep in water. Rats everywhere, somehow prospering. Men freezing to death on picket duty. There was so many men dying in January the sky was never wanting for vultures and ravens. Aye, it was bad."

Dudley sought to bring something positive out of this bleak description.

"Not a lot of fighting, though?"

"None to speak of. What was the point? The Russkies were as bad off as we were behind their walls. Not a soul about inside Sevastopol some days except the sentries when they were changed. We even got up a little trade—firewood for tobacco, that sort of thing. Officers trading letters. Some of the boys don't care much for our enemy and wouldn't go for that, but I told them they'd better if they wanted to survive till spring. And I'm still here, so I think I've proved the point."

Dudley could not help grinning.

"I'm sure you've proven a great many points in your lifetime, Sergeant."

"Thank you, Mister Dudley. The other boys knew that, too. I showed 'em how to make candles from rags dipped in pork fat, and how to make their coffee from those green beans the commissary kept giving us. Just find a piece of half-exploded shell, grind the beans with a nine-pound shot, and roast it in a frying pan over a fire of Russian firewood.

"It was also me that got them moving to bring up supplies when the wagons stopped coming. Paired the men off and had 'em carry a beaker of rum, pork or biscuits slung from a pole between them. Rough work and slow going, but better'n starving."

"You're a marvel, Sergeant. I trust things have improved with the weather?"

“That they have, now that it’s no longer quite so cold as it was. We’re getting our wood from the commissariat, as we ought to. And we have a divisional canteen where you can buy butter, cheese, bread, bottled ale for the men and wine for your lot.”

Dudley gave Barker a sideways glance. “My lot?”

Barker shrugged. “Pardon me, sir, but...the officers.”

Dudley halted where Lieutenant-Colonel Freemantle’s tent had been; there was a wooden hut there now. He stared at the door and said to the sergeant, “So Number Three Company is under the charge of this transferred lieutenant?”

“Mister Arbuthnot? No, sir.” Barker hesitated, and his eyes studied the ground for a second before rising again. “We have a new captain, came with the first parcel of reinforcements. Captain David Neville. Brought with him another sergeant, too. Chap named Hoskins.” He scratched at his tangle of beard. “Unsavory chap, if you ask me.”

“I’ll pass judgement myself, Sergeant. So, we have a Captain Neville? I seem to remember there was a Captain Neville at Fairbridge when I was training. Though I don’t recall dealing with him much. Just remember him standing there on the parade when on duty, and making his rounds. That’s all.”

“Yes,” Barker said with a grimace. He cleared his throat. “I remember him well enough, though, sir. He was in the regiment before then got a staff appointment and left for awhile before returning to the depot.”

“So, we have a Lieutenant Arbuthnot, Captain Neville, and then...” Dudley sighed. “...there’s me.”

Barker suddenly drew himself up, back straight as a ramrod.

“I’ll deal with anyone who dares say you’re not a real officer, sir. Beggin’ your pardon, sir, no offence intended.”

Dudley stared at the sergeant, his former adversary, and felt an unexpected wash of gratitude. With it came astonish-

ment that he should be grateful to Barker for anything. Especially in the face of such presumption.

But grateful he was, and he found himself saying, "No offence taken. And I appreciate that, Sergeant. Thank you."



Lieutenant-Colonel Freemantle was in his hut when Dudley reported. The benign old man looked up from the papers on his campaign desk and said, "Welcome back, Ensign Dudley." His smile was genuine, for Dudley's promotion had been Freemantle's doing. "Have you met your new company commander, Major...er, that is, Captain Neville?"

"Not yet, sir," Dudley explained.

"Then you had best go and see him once he is off-duty. Out on picket now, I suspect, with your company. Or maybe they are helping dig. It's difficult to keep track, especially with all these reinforcements coming in day after day." He shuffled his papers for emphasis.

"I believe they may actually be off-duty, sir," Dudley said. "I just spoke to Sergeant Barker."

Freemantle's brows lifted in surprise.

"Oh, indeed. Well, as I said, it's difficult to keep track."

It was strange the colonel would make such a mistake, Dudley thought as he took his leave. He thought a commanding officer should know what was happening within his battalion at all times. But it was not for him to judge. He was nothing but a fresh subaltern.

He made his way to the regimental quartermaster's depot, and there, as he had suspected, he found Oakes. Oakes had come across some of his old comrades, and he and Hester were in the midst of a joyful reunion. Oakes was displaying his empty eye socket to a parcel of gaunt and bearded men. Dudley recognized them as veteran members of his company.

After exchanging joyful greetings, Dudley informed Oakes he was going to meet the company officers. He asked the men for the location of Captain David Neville's tent. They told him, and he excused himself to make his way there.

At the captain's tent, a servant let Dudley in before scurrying off to find his master. Dudley stood inside the flap and waited. He studied the tent's flawless order. Against one canvas wall stood a low cot, its blankets neatly folded. At the foot of the cot was a leather trunk, its brass furnishings gleaming. A camp desk sat at the opposite side of the room. On the desk was a bundle of paper, squared to the desk edge and weighted with an ink bottle.

Such exacting neatness seemed out of place in the Crimea. Whoever this Captain Neville was, Dudley thought, he was a fastidious fellow.

Fifteen minutes passed before the tent flap opened and Dudley finally met his new company commander.

"Ah, yes," the newcomer said, "Our queen's favoured promotion, former Sergeant Dudley."

"Ensign William Dudley, sir," Dudley replied, not caring for these opening remarks.

"Yes, of course," Neville said with a confident smile. He was a tall and well-built man, and it was easy to see he had not been in the Crimea long. His uniform was in as perfect order as his tent. The greatcoat he wore was new, while his high boots gleamed from toe to knee. His sword was just as well-polished. It looked as if he had just trimmed his reddish mustache, and he had oiled his hair and combed it back from his forehead.

Dudley recognized Neville as one of those aloof officers he had sometimes glimpsed during his training. Neville had often stood apart on the edge of the parade square, usually smoking a cigar. He had never looked as if he had anything

to do with the procedures at hand. In that way, he was a typical officer.

“Ensign Dudley it is, then,” Neville added. “I am Major David Neville, though I hold the position of captain in this regiment. Allow me to welcome you back.” He extended his hand for Dudley to shake.

“Thank you, sir. It is indeed good to be back.” Dudley attempted a bit of levity by adding, “I was afraid I might miss the end of the war, to be frank.”

Neville gave him a polite grin, then narrowed his eyes.

“You don’t sound like many ex-sergeants I’ve heard, Ensign. You strike me as an educated man.”

“Yes, sir. I was to go to Cambridge but chose the army instead.”

Neville chuckled in mild disbelief.

“In the ranks?”

Dudley swallowed. “Well, my decision was rather against the wishes of my family, sir. The ranks...were my only option.”

“Ah, well, it has all worked out for you anyhow, what? I trust we shall get along quite well, Ensign.”

Neville seemed on the verge of saying something more, but an artillery duel had broken out at the front. The tent walls rippled with each concussion, although the guns were several miles away.

“Does seem to be a constant thing,” the captain muttered. Then he turned back to Dudley. “Have your servant take your baggage to Lieutenant Arbuthnot’s tent. He’s in there alone, so you may as well share. Er, you have a servant, don’t you?”

“Yes, sir,” Dudley replied. The only baggage he owned was his enlisted man’s knapsack and its few contents, but he saw no need to mention this.

“Good, then.”

That was the end of the interview. Dudley trudged off to find his new lodgings.



Sergeant Brian Barker wandered back from the Light Division canteen, a pound of cheese and some Turkish tobacco clutched in his left hand. He was worried, and aimed to have a sit-down and a smoke to sort things out. He always thought better when he had some activity to keep his body busy, even when that activity was just puffing away on a pipe. When the body was busy, the mind could not help but work along with it.

He thought of his chance meeting with Ensign Dudley. Dudley had been an upstart lance-corporal when Barker had first met him, young and inexperienced. He had possessed an infuriating educated bearing mixed with bewilderment and enthusiasm. Barker had not been sympathetic to anyone's situation but his own at the time, and had decided to make Dudley a target. He had tried to make Dudley's life as difficult as possible.

Dudley had been sincere in his passion for the army and all its notions of honour and glory, of duty to God, Queen, and Comrades. Barker had hoped to see him fall, to see his beliefs come crashing down. For that to happen, the army would have to fail, and Barker knew that it would, sooner or later.

This prediction came true with the onset of the war. The expeditionary force had waited for months in Varna, sitting idle and waiting for disaster. Then the cholera had struck. As Barker had hoped, Dudley had reacted with disillusioned outrage.

But instead of condemning the army, Dudley had looked for ways to improve things where he could. He insisted that if the army had made mistakes, it would not make them again.

At least, not if reasonable men were in charge, and the British were reasonable people.

This naive optimism—or perhaps it was not so naive after all—had been infectious. Bit by bit, Barker had come to like Dudley, to see in him the ideals and hopes he had once shared then lost.

Barker had thought he had lost those ideals forever, but in the mud and horror of last autumn's campaigning, he had found them again in the outstanding morale of his comrades. Their ability to prevail against overwhelming odds while fighting the enemy, their own administrators, and the earth itself had made him feel weak-willed and petulant. He was unworthy of their company, he had felt, and unworthy of the memory of his wife, who had been one of the many victims of the cholera epidemic.

Perhaps he would never trust or respect military authority as he once had. Respect would have to be earned from now on, and his standards were high. But he had regained his sense of duty to his comrades, and to the high dreams of his youth. He had also regained his rank of sergeant—and his determination to keep it.

That was why he was worried. Circumstances had changed, and now threatened that determination. Events had given his new-found confidence a bit of a check. He did not fear many things—not death, nor a stout flogging, nor the imposed will of another. But there was one thing he did fear, and that was losing his self-control again, and with it his self-respect.

He feared something would happen to cause him to slip back into the old frame of mind, the self-pitying frame of mind. He had lived with it for years, and its memory brought nothing but shame. He would not go back if he could help it.

He had once faced a charge of neglect of duty. His conviction had brought with it a demotion and a reputation for

bad character. The charge had not been true, but in his indignation, he had done nothing to clear his name. Instead, he had become what he had denied being. At the time, he had seen that reaction as a challenge to those who had destroyed him. But in reality, it had been a form of self-pity, of self-indulgence. Self-pity at the unfair treatment he had received from two young officers.

One of those officers was dead now, killed at the Alma, and damn his soul. The other was still alive. He was a gentleman, an officer whose word had meant much more than that of a sergeant.

An officer named David Neville.



Lieutenant Arbuthnot's tent was on the same camp street as Captain Neville's. Dudley ducked his head through the flap, but the tent was unoccupied. Stepping inside, he surveyed the scattered contents, the belongings of the man who would become his closest companion.

A cot stood on the dirt floor, and beside it sat a small iron-bound trunk and a pair of polished shoes. Other items included a canvas camp stool, a small writing desk that could rest in one's lap, and a campaign saddle and saddle bags. From the central pole hung an oil lantern, and below it a small looking-glass.

It was not the picture of tidiness Neville's quarters had been, but Dudley was still reluctant to touch anything. He chose a patch of floor near the flap to spread one of his two wool blankets. This was all he had for bedding until he could find something better.

He was still smoothing the blanket's corners when the flap opened and in popped a man's head. When the newcomer spied Dudley on the floor, he exclaimed, "Oh!"

Dudley leapt up from his crouch and said, "Lieutenant Arbuthnot? I'm William Dudley, the new subaltern."

Arbuthnot blinked a few times, his mouth sagging in bewilderment. He had a round chubby face, a receding hairline, and a pair of oval spectacles on the end of his nose. After a moment, his cheeks rose in a broad grin, and he said, "Yes, of course! Ha-ha! Gave me a startle there for a minute, thought I was being burgled or something. William Dudley, eh? Well, I'm Harry Arbuthnot. Harry Arbuthnot, and pleased to make your acquaintance."

Arbuthnot stepped inside, and they shook hands. The lieutenant then glanced around and said, "I'd best move some of my things to one side, eh? I see you haven't brought much with you, though I'm sure you will be picking up some necessaries soon."

Dudley already owned what an enlisted man considered necessary, but he said, "I aim to send my servant down to Balaclava tomorrow to find me a pony and a packsaddle."

"You have a servant, do you? Well, that's jolly fine. We're all aware you're from the ranks, but I don't mind. After all, Sir Colin Campbell had a humble beginning, and there's no finer soldier in this army."

Dudley nodded, wondering if he should consider this remark an insult. He decided not to. This Arbuthnot seemed an agreeable character, and had spoken with obvious good will. Dudley's guard began to fall.

"So, you were in Scutari hospital," Arbuthnot went on excitedly. "Did you see Miss Nightingale there? We've all heard so much about her and her ladies. I say, that's an intriguing medallion."

Dudley's coat was undone, displaying his tin soldier where it hung from its chain. Arbuthnot stared at it in apparent fascination.

“Yes, that’s Wellington,” Dudley explained. “Last of a box of tin soldiers my father gave me when I was very young. I keep him for good luck.”

“Well, he seems to work, don’t he, given your career so far! I have a good luck charm, too, you know.” Arbuthnot sprang to his trunk and threw back the lid. Reaching inside, he took out a small bundle. When he had brought the bundle into the light, Dudley saw that it was a braid of what looked like human hair. It was about a foot and a half long and tied on one end with a bit of green ribbon. Arbuthnot gazed on it with reverence.

“The hair of my dear Margaret,” he said, voice hushed. “My fiancée, waiting for me in England.” He lifted the braid to stroke one plump cheek with it. “She had to have it cut but gave it to me for good luck. As I said.”

“That was a charming thing for her to do.” Dudley felt his relief giving way to mild horror. Then again, he thought, some might have considered his tin soldier strange, while it was common for men to carry locks of hair—if not full braids—from their sweethearts.

“Yes.” Arbuthnot caressed the length of brown hair for another moment then gently returned it to the trunk.

Dudley cleared his throat then asked, “So, how goes the conduct of the siege? Has the regiment been involved in any recent scraps?”

“The siege? Well, I suppose you arrived just too late for yesterday’s sortie. And the French and their obsession with taking the Mamelon rifle pits.”

“Mamelon?” Dudley did not remember a fort of that name.

Arbuthnot sat on the lid of his trunk.

“A detached earthwork the Russians have built several yards out from the Malakoff. It had been just a low hill the French were holding, but the enemy took it late last month, pushing

back the French right-attack. Now the Russians have thrown up walls and dug a series of rifle pits in front. The French have been desperate to take those rifle pits." He shook his head. "The Russians have counterattacked several times, and last night made an attack all along the allied lines. We took about a hundred casualties, I am told, the French two hundred. But you should have seen the Russian dead. They left some eight hundred fellows lying in front of our trenches."

"So, really, the conduct of the war has not changed since last November," Dudley murmured, half to himself.

Arbuthnot removed his spectacles and began polishing the lenses with a handkerchief.

"No," he said, sounding disappointed. "I suppose not."

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