

# BOLD PROTECTOR

by Lorraine Beasley

'Oh Jacob .... please hurry .... I don't mean to be such a baby .... but.... I'm beginning to feel a little.... queasy ....' Mary, her face pale, her eyes wide and dewy with unshed tears, bit down bravely on her bottom lip, as Jacob Wells, the man that she had known for so many years, simply, as Father, gently turned her extended right index finger under a large magnifying glass positioned beneath the Tiffany lamp that he used to read by.

'I'm sorry Mary ....' Father sighed softly, regarding the middle-aged lady over the top of his glasses, which were perched precariously on the bridge of his nose. '....this is going to need more than a pair of tweezers, I'm afraid ....' He sighed again, returning his attention to the sewing needle which was deeply embedded in the tip of Mary's finger. 'How on earth did this happen, anyway'? He quizzed.

'I asked Mouse to fix my machine. It wasn't running so smoothly ....'

'Ah Mouse... I should have known ....' Father sighed in resignation.

'He thought that he was doing me a favour by making it go faster ....said my work would be done in half the time ....' Mary smiled wanly. 'Dear child ....' She winced then, as Jacob moved her throbbing finger once again. 'How bad is it, Father'?

'Well ....' He mused. '....it's pretty close to the bone ....'

'Father....' At that moment, a tall, tawny haired, broad-shouldered man with unique, leonine features entered the chamber down four small metal steps. 'Oh .... I'm sorry ....' He halted abruptly, his deep velvet voice full of sincerity, as he noted that his father was not alone. 'I didn't realise that you were busy .... I will come back in a little while ....'

'Nonsense, Vincent ....' Father regarded the younger man curiously. 'What did you want'? He asked, peering at his son over the rim of his spectacles.

'Nothing, Father... it wasn't important ... just something that Mouse mentioned in passing....' Vincent explained, his gaze travelling past Father, to Mary, who looked uncomfortable and in considerable pain.

'Mouse! That boy!' Father exclaimed.

'I can see that you are busy....'

'Yes... Vincent, come and take a look at this ....,' Father invited absently. Vincent strolled over to where Father was standing, and Mary was sitting, pale faced, her bottom lip between her teeth, her right arm extended toward the light.

Vincent peered curiously over Father's shoulder, through the magnifying glass, to Mary's finger, which was bleeding, just a little, where an inch of sewing needle protruded from the tip. Not usually a man renowned for his weak stomach, Vincent suddenly felt his stomach roil, and swallowed hard.

'I was just saying to Mary ....,' Father continued, oblivious to his son's apparent discomfort. '....I don't think the needle has actually struck the bone ....'

Thud.

'Vincent'? Father turned carefully around to find his son lying prostrate on the floor.

'Vincent!' He exclaimed, letting go of Mary's hand to kneel painfully and awkwardly because of his game leg, beside the gentle giant who was the community's guardian and protector.

'Did you see what happened, Mary?' Father asked, gently reaching out to feel for a pulse, finding it strong and regular, beating at a constant rate in the artery in Vincent's thick set neck. Jacob then gently peeled back one of Vincent's eyelids to reveal a startlingly blue eye, pupil immediately responsive to light, and let out a soft sigh of relief.

'Well, Father ....?' Mary sniffed, trying to conceal a smile. 'I guess he just ....'

'Fainted'?

'Yes? Mary chuckled, the pain in her finger forgotten for the moment.

'Oh my... how the mighty do fall .... Our brave protector undone by a sewing needle ....' Father chuckled softly, allowing himself to enjoy the moment of amusement now that he was sure that there was nothing seriously wrong with his son. 'Poor boy ... he wont live this down in a hurry ....' He grinned. '

Shouldn't we be doing something to help him'? Mary, her face flushed now with the effort of trying not to laugh out loud, asked softly.

'No my dear... he'll come around in his own good time. Father assured, leaning heavily against his walking stick, as he stiffly got back on his feet. Almost as though on cue, Vincent let out a soft little moan, his eyes fluttering open, and settling on his father's amused countenance. He let out a deep sigh, closed his eyes and groaned deeply.

What happened'? he asked in a low voice.

'You ....fainted, my boy.' Father spluttered.

'Fainted'? Vincent groaned again, gingerly sitting up. It all came flooding back to him, as he spotted Mary, still seated beside the Tiffany lamp, holding her hand gingerly under the light.

'Oh yes ....'

'What happened my boy'? Father asked, plainly curious to know why Vincent had so suddenly taken this bad turn. 'You're not usually so weak stomached ....' He commented with a wry smile.

'Well....it might have something to do with using the words 'needle' and 'bone' so close together in the same sentence ....' Vincent sighed, carefully getting to his feet and staggering across the room to the chair beside Father's chessboard, sitting down heavily, as he brushed his fluffy red/gold bangs from his face.

'Oh my ....' Father chuckled softly. 'I'm sorry Vincent ... but you have to admit... with everything that you have seen ....'

'Yes Father, I know ....all the violence .... all the blood ....'

'All the years that you have helped me out in the hospital chamber....,' Father added quickly. 'And then something like this makes you keel over... turn up your toes ....' Father grinned, walking over to where Vincent sat, his head in his hands, his hair falling in a fluffy golden curtain around his bowed head. 'Don't take it so hard my boy .... we all have our off days .... this just makes you .... more .... human ....' He patted the young man's shoulder affectionately.

'It's so humiliating ....' Vincent groaned.

'Not at all ....' Father placated. 'Look, no-one will think any the less of you, Vincent ....no-one will think you any less a man ....' This drew Vincent's deep aqua gaze. 'In fact, as I recall .... the very first time I entered an operating room.... they carried me out again on a gurney.' Father confessed. 'Not the most auspicious beginnings as a surgeon, you must admit.? He grinned. 'But, the surgeon later looked me up and told me not to despair, that it happened all the time ... an occupational hazard. We wouldn't be human if we could always cope with everything, Vincent ....'

'Is that meant to make me feel better'? Vincent mumbled thickly.

'Sometimes Vincent, the least expected little things in life are our undoing... they remind us of our frailty....our smallness in the big picture that is life. Today was your turn. That's all. A little humility is good for the soul ....' He grinned rakishly then, patting the younger man's hand affectionately. 'You'll survive,' he chuckled. 'On the other hand... poor Mary might just expire from exasperation if I don't hurry up and remove that needle ....'

Father watched as Vincent's large Adam's apple bounced up and down in his throat, as the young man swallowed hard, his beautiful blue eyes suddenly disappearing into the back of his head, as he sank, lifeless, to the floor of the chamber once more, with a soft thud.

'Vincent!' Father exclaimed incredulously.

'Father!' Mary echoed his concern.

'Oh well....' Father sighed expressively, bending stiffly to gently push his son's hair back from his relaxed face and smiled softly. 'He'll be all right Mary ....' He patted the rough whiskered cheek affectionately. '.... let's just hope that he never has to darn his own socks!'

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