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of him, Mr. Bellew, with one arm, over there by the peaches."

GLANCING in the direction she indicated, Bellew observed a tall figure, very straight and upright, clad in a tight fitting blue coat, with extremely tight trousers strapped beneath the insteps, and with a hat balanced upon his close cropped, grizzled head at a perfectly impossible angle for any save an ex-cavalryman. Now, as he stood examining a peach tree that flourished against the opposite wall, Bellew saw that his right sleeve was empty, sure enough, and was looped across his broad chest.

"The very first thing he will say will be, 'It is a very fine day,'" nodded Miss Priscilla, stitching away faster than ever, "and the next, 'The peaches are doing very well.' Now mark my words, Mr. Bellew!"

As she spoke, the Sergeant wheeled suddenly right about face, and came striding down toward them, jingling imaginary spurs, and with his stick tucked up under his remaining arm, very much as if it had been a saber.

Being come up to them, the Sergeant raised a stiff arm as though about to salute them, military fashion; but, apparently changing his mind, took off the straw hat instead and put it on again, more over one ear than ever.

"A particular fine day, Miss Priscilla, for the time o' the year," said he.

"Indeed, I quite agree with you, Sergeant," returned little Miss Priscilla with a bright nod and a sly glance at Bellew, as much as to say, "I told you so!"

"And the peaches, Ma'am," continued the Sergeant, "the peaches never looked better, Ma'am." Having said which, he stood looking at nothing in particular, with his one hand resting lightly upon his hip.

"Yes, to be sure, Sergeant," nodded Miss Priscilla, with another sly look. "But let me introduce you to Mr. Bellew, who is staying at Dapplemere."

The Sergeant stiffened, once more began a salute, changed his mind, took off his hat instead, and, after looking at it as though not quite sure what to do with it next, clapped it back upon his ear, in imminent danger of falling off, and was done with it. "Proud to know you, Sir; your servant, Sir!"

"How do you do?" said Bellew, and held out his hand with his frank smile.

The Sergeant hesitated, then put out his remaining hand. "My left, Sir," said he apologetically. "Can't be helped—left my right out in India a good many years ago. Good place for soldiering, India, Sir,—plenty of active service, chances of promotion,—though sun bad."

"Sergeant," said Miss Priscilla, without seeming to glance up from her sewing, "Sergeant, your hat!"

Hereupon, the Sergeant gave a sudden sidewise jerk of the head, and in the very nick of time saved the article in question from tumbling off, and very dexterously brought it to the top of his close cropped head, whence it immediately began, slowly and by scarcely perceptible degrees, to slide down to his ear again.

"Sergeant," said Miss Priscilla again, "sit down, do."

"Thank you, Ma'am," said he, and proceeded to seat himself at the other end of the rustic bench, where he remained, bolt upright and with his long legs stretched out straight before him, as is and has been the manner of cavalrymen since they first wore straps.

"And now," said he, staring straight in front of him, "how might Miss Anthea be?"

"Oh, very well, thank you," nodded Miss Priscilla.

"Good!" exclaimed the Sergeant, with his eyes still fixed. "Very good!" Here he passed his hand two or three times across his shaved chin, regarding an apple tree nearby with an expression of the most profound interest.

"And how," said he again, "how might Master Georgy be?"

"Master Georgy is as well as ever," answered Miss Priscilla, stitching away faster than before, and Bellew thought she kept her rosy cheeks stooped a little lower over her work.

Meanwhile the Sergeant continued to regard the tree with the same degree of lively interest, and to rasp his fingers to and fro across his chin. Suddenly he coughed behind his hand, whereupon Miss Priscilla raised her head and looked at him.

"Well?" she inquired very softly.

"And pray, Ma'am," said the Sergeant, removing his gaze from the tree with a jerk, "how might—you be feeling, Ma'am?"

"Much the same as usual, thank you," she answered, smiling like a girl, for all her white hair, as the Sergeant's eyes met hers.

"You look," said he, pausing to cough behind his hand again, "you look—blooming, Ma'am, if you'll allow the expression,—blooming, as you ever do, Ma'am."

"I'm an old woman, Sergeant, as well you know," sighed Miss Priscilla, shaking her head.

"Old, Ma'am?" repeated the Sergeant. "Old, Ma'am? Nothing of the sort, Ma'am! Age has nothing to do with it. 'Tisn't the years as count. We aren't any older than we feel—eh, Sir?"

"Of course not," answered Bellew.

"Nor than we look—eh, Sir?"

"Certainly not, Sergeant," answered Bellew.

"And she, Sir, she don't look a day older than—"

"Thirty-five," said Bellew.

"Exactly, Sir, very true. My own opinion, —thirty-five exactly, Sir."

"Sergeant," said Miss Priscilla, bending over her work again, "Sergeant, your hat!"

The Sergeant, hereupon, removed the distracting headgear altogether, and sat with it on his knee, staring hard at the tree again. Then, all at once with a sudden gesture he drew a large silver watch from his pocket, rather as if it were some weapon of offense, looked at it, listened to it, and then, nodding his head, rose to his feet.

"Must be going," he said, standing very straight, and looking down at little Miss Priscilla; "though sorry, as ever. Must be going, Ma'am, Miss Priscilla, Ma'am. Good day to you." And he stretched out his hand to her with a sudden jerky movement.

Miss Priscilla paused in her sewing, and looked up at him with her youthful smile. "Must you go so soon, Sergeant? Then goodby, until tomorrow," and she laid her very small hand in his big palm.

The Sergeant stared down at it as though greatly minded to raise it to his lips; instead of doing which he dropped it suddenly, and turned to Bellew:

"Sir, I am proud to have met you. Sir, there is a poor crippled soldier as I know; his cottage is very small, and humble, Sir; but if you ever feel like dropping in on him, Sir, by day or night, he will be honored, Sir, honored. And that's me, Sergeant Richard Appleby, late of the 19th Hussars—at your service, Sir!" saying which, he put on his hat, stiff armed, wheeled, and strode away through the orchard, jingling his imaginary spurs louder than ever.

WELL?" inquired Miss Priscilla in her quick, bright way, "well, Mr. Bellew, what do you think of him? First impressions are always best; at least, I think so. What do you think of Sergeant Appleby?"

"I think he's a splendid fellow," said Bellew, looking after the Sergeant's upright figure.

"A very foolish old fellow, I think, and as stiff as one of the ramrods of one of his own guns," said Miss Priscilla; but her clear, blue eyes were very soft and tender as she spoke.

"And as fine a soldier as a man, I'm sure," said Bellew.

"Why, yes, he was a good soldier, once upon a time, I believe,—he won the Victoria Cross for doing something or other that was very brave, and he wears it with all his other medals, pinned on the inside of his coat. Oh, yes, he was a fine soldier once; but he's a very foolish old soldier now, I think, and as stiff as the ramrod of one of his own guns. But I'm glad you like him, Mr. Bellew, and he will be proud and happy for you to call and see him at his cottage. And now, I suppose, it is half-past eleven, isn't it?"

"Yes, just half-past," nodded Bellew, glancing at his watch.

"Exact to time, as usual," said Miss Priscilla. "I don't think the Sergeant has missed a minute or varied a minute in the last five years; you see, he is such a very methodical man, Mr. Bellew."

"Why, does he come every day, at the same hour?"

"Every day," nodded Miss Priscilla. "It has become a matter of habit with him."

"Ah!" said Bellew, smiling.

"If you were to ask me why he comes, I should answer that I fancy it is to—look at the peaches. Dear me, Mr. Bellew! what a very foolish old soldier he is, to be sure!" Saying which, pretty, bright-eyed Miss Priscilla laughed again, folded up her work, settled it in the basket with a deft little pat, and, rising, took a small crutch stick from where it had lain concealed, and then Bellew saw that she was lame.

"Oh, yes, I'm a cripple, you see," she nodded,—"oh, very, very lame; my ankle, you know. That is why I came here,—the big world didn't want a poor, lame, old woman,—that is why Miss Anthea made me her aunt, God bless her! No, thank you, I can carry my basket. So, you see, he has lost an arm, his right one, and I am lame in my foot. Perhaps that is why— Heigho! how beautifully the blackbirds are singing this morning, to be sure!"

To be continued next Sunday

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