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The Colonel's Early Love.

IT WAS just a cherub's face under a forage cap which met Colonel Cotherstone's angry gaze, as he sat bolt upright in his chair one Sunday afternoon. A cherub's face, smooth and fair, which had as yet not the faintest sign of a mustache; a face with languishing azure eye that went straight to Colonel Cotherstone's heart, in spite of his anger and the popular belief that he was in the fortunate possession of a lump of adamant instead of that too frequently inconvenient organ. The scene was the Colonel's room in the cavalry barracks at York; the time between three and four in the afternoon; dramatis personae, Colonel Edward le Gendre Cotherstone, Sergeant Major McAllister, and Private Edward Jones, F troop. It was private Edward Jones who owned the cherub's face, the languishing blue eyes, the long lithe limbs, and, alas also a bad character.

"Sergeant Major, you can go," said Colonel Cotherstone curtly; whereupon that personage, having saluted, departed, feeling pretty sure that Private Jones was coming in for a severe wiggling, or, as he put it, "the Colonel's going to give it 'im proper."

But Colonel Cotherstone did not immediately set about the task which he had imposed upon himself. An obstacle not very often coming between commanding officers and their troopers, presented itself in the shape of that dainty cherub face, with the fair waving hair and the languishing azure eyes, so like another face that he had known long ago and loved! At last, however, he forced himself to speak.

"And how long is this state of things to continue?" he demanded sternly.

Private Jones maintained a discrete silence, but he shifted his long legs nervously and lowered his eyes until the colonel could no longer see them. Once their gaze withdrawn from him he was able to speak fluently enough. Usually Colonel Cotherstone did not find himself at a loss for words.

"Now, look here, Jones," he said kindly, yet with sufficient firmness to make his words impressive, "we must have a change. Almost every day I hear of some fresh misdemeanor, idleness, insubordination, work half done or left undone altogether, infringement of rules, absence without leave. What is the end to be?"

Private Jones shot one swift glance at his chief's keen and angry face, opened his mouth as if to speak, but ended by remaining silent; the colonel, however continued:

"By what chain of circumstances you came to enlist I do not know; but if you imagined for an instant that your birth would permit you to ride roughshod over everything, why, you made a mistake. Because you are a gentleman, because you can speak half a dozen different languages, because you have got through your fortune and made an utter fool of yourself, you cannot be excused your duties or have your misdoings passed over without punishment. I dare say it's hard for you to be restricted, to obey the non-commissioned officers, to turn out of your bed at five o'clock, to live with men of different rank from your own; but you should have considered all that before you brought yourself down to your present position. With your advantages of education, you might get your commission in the course of a few years, and win back the position you have lost; but whilst your present bad conduct continues I can do nothing for you. I cannot pass you over the heads men who do their duty conscientiously, men whom I can trust. If you do not

choose to alter your present ways you must make up your mind to remain a private always; there is no favoritism in the army. You have now been five months in the regiment, and those five months have been utterly wasted; always shielding yourself behind the fact that by your birth you are a gentleman—by birth and education. I tell you, sir, those two facts are a disgrace to you—simply a disgrace—instead of a blessing and an honor. As yet I have kept you out of the degradation of the cells; but I find that punishment by fines is of no avail—the punishment of a fine simply falls on your mother."

Private Jones lifted his face, all crimsoned by shameful blushes, and repeated Colonel Cotherstone's concluding words: "My mother, sir?"

"Your mother, sir," returned the chief sternly. "If you have no consideration for your family, for yourself, for the honor of your old name; no shame at the contempt of your officers, no dread of what the end of all this will be, does the thought of the mother who bore you never cross your mind?"

The lad turned away in confused silence.

"Answer me!" thundered the chief.

He spoke then for the first time, spoke in such a soft drawing voice that Col. Cotherstone absolutely shivered, it was so like that other voice:

"Yes, sir, I do; only it is so hard," with a great sigh.

"What is so hard—your work?"

"No, sir; I don't know that I find the work so bad. I could always groom a horse well, and the stable work I soon got used to. And I don't mind the men—they're rough, but they're good-natured most of them; but it's the non-commissioned officers—I can't stand them, sir."

"Why not?"

"I can do with old McAllister, sir," said the lad eagerly, almost forgetting his drawl; "but the sergeants in F troop—O Lord!" with another sigh. "If I please one I displease another. It's having so many masters, and each thinks he has a right to bully me as hard as he likes, because they've got a few shillings worth of gold lace on their jackets, I suppose."

"Which they have won by their own good conduct," rejoined the colonel.—"I'll tell you what it is, Hamilton: you're a young fool, with only a little further to go in the direction you're now in to find yourself at the devil."

"You know me, sir!" the lad gasped.

"I knew your—people," answered the colonel curtly. He had almost said "your mother," but changed the word in time to "people;" "and for your name's sake—not for your own, mind—I will give you one more chance. If I move you out of F troop into Sergeant McAllister's, will you give me your word to try and reform?"

The crimson tide flushed anew over the lad's face. A rush of feeling (could that darkness be tears?) flooded into his azure eyes. He forgot that he was only private Jones, and that the tall man with the stern bronzed face before him was that awe-inspiring being, "the commanding officer," Colonel Cotherstone, one of the strictest martinet in the service—he forgot it all. He only remembered that he was Hamilton of Glenbarry, and that this was the first real kindness, except old McAllister's, that he had met with for months. In the impulse of the moment he held out his hand, and said heartily: "I'll try, sir."

Colonel Cotherstone just laid his fingers in the out stretched hand for a moment.

"Very well, Hamilton, I'll take your word," he replied gravely. "Now you can go."

When the door had closed behind the lad, Colonel Cotherstone sat down again in his arm chair and tried to think; but think he could not. A vision of a cherub's face under a forage cap came persistently between him and his thoughts. How many years was it ago that just such a head and face and lingered in his memory—just such a cherub's face, and under a forage cap? And yet there was a difference. The mother's sweet blue eyes had looked straight into his own, with never the shade of shame he had seen in those of the son that very day, and the forage cap, from under which the mother's golden curls had strayed,

bore the gold band of an officer, instead of the simple yellow of the dragoon.

He was not altogether easy in his mind, that big bronzed soldier. He knew that, in spite of his stern words, he had treated Private Jones a great deal too easily, else he would not have sent the sergeant major away. It is not altogether usual for commanding officers to talk to refractory soldiers as he had talked to Private Jones, and yet—

"No," he muttered, "I couldn't be hard on Mary's boy, who came and looked at me with Mary's eyes, and talked to me with Mary's soft tongue.—Poor little Mary!" and straightway his thoughts flew back to the little scene enacted ever so many years ago, and which had been recalled so vividly to his memory that afternoon, a scene of which the principal incident was a cherub's face under a forage cap.

Naturally, before Edward le Gendre Cotherstone had obtained his regiment, he had held the respective positions of major, captain, lieutenant, and cornet. Well, it was when he was only Cornet Cotherstone, and but two-and-twenty, that he was foolish enough to fall in love.

At that time, the Cuirassiers were quartered at Edinburgh, and it was in the modern Athens that he and his Fate met. That was one-and-twenty years before the opening of this story, when Colonel Cotherstone was forty-three, a first-rate soldier, and, considering all things, fairly popular, though his officers, especially the subalterns, quite believed in a theory, now many years' standing, which declared him to be minus several important internal arrangements, one of which was a heart the other being the bowels of compassion. He certainly was very hard.—They all vowed he had not a single soft spot in his whole composition, but they were wrong. A soft place he had and the unruly lad with the cherub's face had been lucky enough to find it out.

As I said before, Edward le Gendre Cotherstone was two-and-twenty when he fell in love for the first—and indeed, the only—time. He was driving along Prince's-street one afternoon, when a small Skye terrier managed to get itself under his horse's heels, and, in addition to that, one of the wheels passed over it. At every period of his life Edward Cotherstone had been as keen as a hawk is popularly supposed to be, and a vision of a golden-haired girl dressed in black, who uttered a piteous cry, and put two little black-gloved hands out to rescue the little animal who was howling frightfully, caused him to pull up the trap with a jerk, and jump down.

"Oh, I am sorry," he said, bending over the little creature, now whining piteously in its young mistress' arms.—"I am so grieved. I hope it is not much hurt."

The girl's blue eyes, half drowned as they were in tears, flashed an indignant glance at him.

"Wouldn't you be hurt," she asked bluntly, pointing to the wheel as she spoke, "if that had gone right over your body?"

"What can I do to help you?" he asked, wisely ignoring the question.—"Can I drive you home?"

"I live at Portobello," she answered, helplessly.

"Please let me drive you there," he urged. "Let me hold him whilst you get in, and then I'll lay him ever so carefully on your lap."

And so he had his own way; that was a little peculiarity of Edward Cotherstone's. He took the dog from her with the utmost tenderness and without eliciting a single cry; and when she had mounted into the high trap he restored it to her gentle keeping. On the way down to Portobello, he gathered that the young lady's name was Stewart, Mary Stewart, and that she lived with her grandmother, who did not often go out. She told him, too, that she was seventeen; and that Fluff, the injured Skye, had been given to her by her cousin Hamilton, of Glenbarry. She also told him that her father had not been dead many months, and that she had been to both London and Paris. In fact, she was so very communicative, that he thought he knew everything there was to know about her; but, notwithstanding her apparent candor, there was one trifling circumstance which, had

she mentioned it, would have spared him many a bitter heartache. She did not mention it, however. He took her to her home, and sent his trap away, as she wished him to examine and determine the full extent of the dog's injuries. He was introduced to the aged grandmother, who took quite a fancy to him by reason of having been at school—goodness knows how many years previously—with his great-aunt. She, too, mentioned Hamilton, of Glenbarry, and mentioned him, moreover, in a way which did not show that any large amount of love was lost between them.

"He does not always behave very respectfully to grandmamma," Mary confided to him in an undertone. "He calls her 'old lady,' and she can't bear it."

"Confounded cad!" thought Mr. Cotherstone.

They found upon examination that Fluff was not very much the worse for his accident; and little Miss Stewart was comforted beyond measure when the young Cuirassier assured her that when the bruises had passed off he would be all right again.

But of course he called next day to ask after Fluff and ascertain if Miss Stewart had recovered from her fright. He was remarkably attentive to the old lady, and won her heart as easily as he did that of her granddaughter. For some months this kind of thing continued. Edward Cotherstone grew more and more happy; but the little Mary faded somewhat, drooped as does a floweret for want of water and sunshine. Sometimes she frightened him, she looked so pale, so wan and fragile; then again she would brighten when he appeared and throw him into fresh transports of love and happiness; and so this pretty play went on until it was played out; for one fine morning in June the crash came. He had gone in for half an hour, because he knew Mrs. Stewart would not be visible so early in the day. Mary looked so bright and fresh that the young soldier was tempted to take her in his arms and kiss her, calling her by every fond and endearing name he could think of, telling her over and over again how he loved, how very, very dearly he loved her, his little Scottish lassie, and a good deal more in the same strain. And Mary, what of her? She never drew back, never whispered the faintest hint of that secret which lay between her and him—the secret which once or twice he had almost stumbled upon. No, she clung to him with an almost despairing passion, which made him feel uneasy in spite of his happiness, and she twined her soft arms around his throat, and cried incredulously:

"Do you really love me, Eddie?"

"Really, my darling," he answered.

And then she broke from the clasp of his loving arms almost impatiently, though the love light still shone in her azure eyes, the dimpling smiles still played about her tender mouth.

"I shall try on your cap," she announced coquettishly; then stuck the golden bordered cap on the side of her head, and, turning from the glass, looked at him with passionate love filling her blue eyes—love which she had caught from him. The sound of a carriage stopping without caused her to turn her head, and when she looked at him again the smiles had frozen on her sweet mouth, and a nameless horror had taken the place of the tender light which a moment before was shining in her eyes.

"Oh, my darling, what is it?" the young soldier cried, in sudden affright.

"It is Hamilton, of Glenbarry," she answered in a hoarse whisper.

"What is he to you?" Cotherstone cried, passionately.

"He is my—"

"Your what? For God's sake, speak and let me know the worst!" he said fiercely.

"He will be my husband," she answered, in a voice almost inaudible.

With almost brutal roughness, Cotherstone thrust her away from him, caught up his cap and gloves, and strode out of the house, where he had spent such blissful hours, and where, alas, he had had such a bitter blow, and he never saw her again.

The following day came a piteous note of explanation; how her father had wished it; how she had given Hamilton the promise to please her father when

he was dying; how she had not the courage to tell him earlier, because she had never dreamed he could care for her; how she was very, very unhappy, very—with a great dash under the adverb, and a woeful blister just below—how, though she must keep her promise she would love her darling Eddie best all her life long.

And that was the end of it. A few weeks later he saw the announcement of her marriage in the papers, and then he tore her letter up and set himself to forget her. On the whole he succeeded fairly well. He threw himself heart and soul into his profession, with what result we have seen. He succeeded in making every one, even himself, believe he was a man of the consistency of stone; and yet, when Private Jones, brought in to receive a severe lecture, not for one, but for a dozen misdemeanors, came and looked at him out of Mary's soft, blue eyes, and talked to him in Mary's soft voice, he could not find it in his heart—his adamant heart—to be hard upon Mary's boy.

The vision of the cherub's face under a forage cap threw him back with painful distinctness to the time, one-and-twenty years before, when he parted from Mary. He realized that Saturday afternoon in November that perhaps he had been very hard upon her, poor little soul! He might, at least, have staid and said a few kind words to the poor little woman, who was bound to a man she hated; that she hated Hamilton there could be no doubt, for the look of loathing and horror which leaped into her eyes as she realized his presence proclaimed her feelings plainly enough. Ah! poor darling—he had got from "poor little soul" to "poor darling"—but he felt now that he had been cruel to her; he might at least have answered that heart-broken, despairing letter, and so, perhaps, have made her lot less hard to bear than it probably was.—Well, at all events, he had not been hard upon the boy, that was one consoling point. Boys will go wrong, especially when they have no father to keep them straight. He had suspected all along who Private Jones really was, though till that very afternoon he had not been quite certain. He wondered if a letter to his mother would do any good. She was a widow now, poor soul—Hamilton had been dead ten years, he knew—and naturally took an interest in her only child—that Mrs. Hamilton of Glenbarry had had but one child, Col. Cotherstone was also aware—and certainly if he wrote a few lines she could not take it amiss, and it might be a comfort to her.

And so Colonel Cotherstone sat down to his writing table to pen an epistle to his old love, Mary Stewart, the mother of that exceedingly wayward young gentleman, Private Edward Jones, F troop.

"She called him after me, too," murmured the commanding officer of the Cuirassiers, as he selected a pen. "Poor little Mary."

It was easy enough to write "November 14th," under the printed "CAVALRY BARRACKS, YORK," which was already stamped on the paper, but he found the next part scarcely so easy. His most natural impulse was to begin, "My dear Mary;" yet when he had written it, he thought it too familiar, so he took another sheet. Having put another "November 14th" at the top, he began, "My dear Mrs. Hamilton—"

"What shall I say next?" he said aloud.

It took him a long time to write this letter; but at last he accomplished it. It was not very long, and it was rather stiff.

"My dear Mrs. Hamilton," it ran, "I have only this afternoon discovered that your son has enlisted in the Cuirassiers under the name of Jones. He has been five months in the regiment; and though as yet he is impatient of restraint, I am in hopes that we shall make a good soldier of him, and, in the course of a few years, that he will obtain his commission. Any interest of mine, you may be sure, he will not want. Believe me, my dear Mrs. Hamilton, most faithfully yours, EDWARD LE GENDRE COTHERSTONE."

That was the letter he wrote and sent. Three days passed, during which he received no reply—a fact which worried him somewhat. On the fourth day