

All's Well That Ends Well.

Colonel Kemp sat at breakfast on a fine September morning in the dining-room of his country house, situated in a beautiful Berkshire glade not far from Windsor. A fine view of the old gentleman was his daughter and only child, Victoria, a blooming, brown-eyed, creamy-cheeked young lady, of about three-and-twenty.

The Colonel, who was a widower, had gained considerable renown during the war in the Punjab. He had earned a great deal of prize-money and numerous medals and crosses, and, having, beside his pension, much private property, partly derived from his deceased wife, he was enabled to keep up both a country and town house and to live in good style.

His daughter Victoria owed her name to her father's extreme loyalty to the sovereign. She was the "apple of his eye," and well did she deserve his warmest affection.

The post had just come in; and the Colonel, while he twirled his egg spoon irritably between his fingers, was consulting one of his letters with a perplexed look.

"What on earth does it mean?" he muttered, "I can't make head or tail to it."

Victoria held her peace, knowing perfectly well that by doing so she would soon be enlightened.

"Here's a letter," continued the Colonel—"a letter from Sunderland—no, Calcutta—from my old friend Cheilstone, containing a very extraordinary proposition—most extraordinary, my dear—most extraordinary!"

Here the Colonel hemmed, adjusted his eye-glass, and glared fiercely at the letter.

"Well, papa, dear, what is it?" his daughter ventured to ask.

"What is it? Just listen, Vic."

And the Colonel read:

"Calcutta, August 1, 1887.

"My DEAR KEMP:—Though many years have elapsed since we fought side by side in the Punjab, I feel satisfied that you retain sufficient regard for your old comrade to do him a real kindness. My eldest son is ordered by the surgeon of our regiment—your own old comrade, you know—to recruit his health by a two years' visit to England. I am rich enough to give him every indulgence, and he will be in England almost as soon as this letter. Never having left India, he knows nothing of our English ways. I have directed him to you. Be to him as a father, and oblige your friend and companion in arms."

"PHILIP CHEILSTONE."

Victoria laughed during the reading of the epistle.

"Well, papa," she said, "you have often wished you had a son; now you will have a ward."

"A pretty thing," grumbled the Colonel, "to be plagued in my old age by some overgrown, overproud brat."

"But, papa! Why, surely Mr. Cheilstone cannot have such a son!"

"How do I know that?" retorted the Colonel. "Many a man makes a fool of himself in his old age."

"But surely, papa, if Mr. Cheilstone was one of our old companions-in-arms, he must be about your own age; and it is not likely—"

"No, it is not likely," snapped the Colonel. "But a good many things happen that are not likely, Vic. The letter doesn't say a word about the fellow's age or anything."

"It is certainly vague," assented Victoria.

"Vague? It's a perfect riddle! What are we to do here with a good growing lad who'll eat like a horse and make love to all the servant maids?"

"Oh, papa, it will not be so bad as that! Young Mr. Cheilstone may be an accomplished young man, or—here she laughed—"a very little boy."

The Colonel smiled grimly.

"I'll write to say I won't have him!" he exclaimed. "Why am I to be turned into a guardian to an Indian hobbler against my will?"

"But you can't write, papa dear, there is no time. Remember, Mr. Cheilstone says his son will be here almost as soon as this letter which has announced his arrival."

"That's true!" muttered the Colonel, quite nonplussed.

"So you see you must submit with a good grace, papa. And now," she continued, rising, "since you have finished breakfast, I'll leave you to read your paper and go and make preparations for this young Indian, who may be expected any hour."

"Very well, dear"—and the Colonel groaned inwardly as he took up his Times—"since there's no help for it."

The Colonel commenced to read his newspaper, while his daughter, hastened to hold a conference with the house-keeper.

At 8 o'clock on the same evening, while Colonel Kemp was lingering over a cup of coffee and Victoria singing to him a series of Scotch ballads, in which the old soldier delighted, "Mr. Sydney Cheilstone" was announced.

The Colonel rose hastily from his seat, with an air of doubt and curiosity, Victoria, followed her father's example, stopped short in the middle of "Auld Robin Gray," and rose involuntarily. But, as their guest, with pleasant smile and extended hand advanced toward the master of the house, it required all the good-brooding and self-possession of the veteran and his daughter to prevent their uttering an exclamation of extreme surprise.

The new-comer was neither an overgrown "hobbledehoy" nor a "very little boy," as surmised by father and daughter. He was a tall, handsome and particularly dignified man of about eight-and-twenty; Sydney Cheilstone, in fact, was so striking in appearance that he would have attracted attention anywhere.

The visitor was—as was to be expected from his never having resided out of India exceedingly dark—so dark, indeed, that his complexion would have been almost disagreeable to the eye of a European but for the great intelligence in his dark eyes and the dazzling whiteness of the teeth, which sent off the dusky hue of his complexion to advantage. His jet-black hair was short, silky and curly, and a small, well-trimmed mustache shaded his upper lip.

"A guardian to that stately animal?" Pool! muttered the Colonel to himself. But he bade him welcome with all the self-possession he could at the moment muster, and introduced him to his daughter.

Victoria, who had been prepared to see a boy of certainly not more than 16, for once entirely lost her presence of mind and colored deeply as she returned young Cheilstone's graceful bow. She felt that she was positively awkward, that her demeanor was more that of a village girl than of a well-bred young lady. She was angry with herself accordingly and the consciousness of her awkwardness did not assist her to appear less gauche. Sydney Cheilstone came to her relief.

"You were singing, Miss Kemp. Pray do not let me disturb you."

"But," put in the Colonel, "have you dined, Mr. Cheilstone?"

"Oh, yes—before I left town."

"But your traps?"

"Oh, your butler is seeing to them. They're being taken to my room."

"His room!" thought the Colonel. "Confound his impudence!" He said aloud, "At least you will let us offer you a cup of coffee?"—and he rang the bell and ordered a fresh supply of cake.

"With much pleasure," said the visitor, "on condition that I do not disturb Miss Kemp."

"Oh, my daughter was only singing to me a Scotch ballad! I have a foolish partiality for Scotch airs."

"Ah! so have I! Miss Kemp was singing 'Auld Robin Gray,' I think. I caught the air as I came up the stairs," and he looked with interest at the young lady.

"Go on then, Vic, since Mr. Cheilstone permits it," said the Colonel.

Victoria hesitated. It seemed, at so early a stage of acquaintance, very like being "trotted out for inspection." But she felt to be occupied anyhow was preferable to sitting unemployed under the searching gaze of the new comers' large dark eyes; and with some nervousness—a thing very unusual with Victoria—she resumed her seat at the piano and recommenced the touching and beautiful ballad. Was it wonderful that the old soldier, who had been full of the young man's story, should be so struck by the young man's voice? Never had the young man in his Anglo-Indian experience had the opportunity of listening to so pure and beautiful a voice. So it was not surprising that Sydney Cheilstone was quite taken by storm; and when, at the conclusion of her ballad, Victoria ventured to glance furtively at him, she was astonished and gratified to perceive that the tears had actually gathered in his eyes, and that he was incapable of uttering a single word of thanks. Even the old Colonel sighed as he stroked Psycho's long silky brown ears.

"Ah," said he, "that's something like music! I don't know whether it's out of my regard for the old Highlander, but the very name of anything Scotch warms my heart. Kiss your old father, Vic darling. You sing like a seraph."

Victoria bent over her father.

"Shall I sing another, papa dear?"

"Oh no—I—that is—prayer excuse me!" burst in Sydney impulsively, and then he looked embarrassed.

The Colonel and Victoria turned to him in surprise.

"You were going to say something?" said the father.

The young man looked more and more confused. After a few moments he stammered out:

"Well, I was going to ask Miss Kemp not to sing any more."

"Ah!" exclaimed the old soldier, delighted. "There's a compliment for you, Vic. Mr. Cheilstone thinks as I do—that, after that, nothing will do. He prefers to retain the impression of 'Auld Robin.' Isn't it so Mr. Cheilstone?"

"Yes, I confess it," returned their visitor, looking at Victoria in a fashion that made her feel strangely agitated and cast down her eyes involuntarily.

"How absurd I am!" she said to herself angrily; yet she felt pleased and gratified, as much by the tribute to herself as by the compliment to her singing.

"Was there ever such a charming woman!" thought Cheilstone.

A month or six weeks had elapsed, and Sydney Cheilstone had become thoroughly domiciled at the Beeches, Colonel Kemp's seat. Already was the young Anglo-Indian on such friendly and affectionate terms with his host that they had many a laugh over the ambiguous wording of the letter written by the former's father.

Indeed, the young man habitually called the Colonel "grandfather," and the old soldier, in return, called him "my little nephew," and the old soldier's "ward," and to undergo much joking and of course, being that there was no real guardianship in the question. The whole mistake had arisen from the Colonel's too hasty interpretation of the letter from Mr. Cheilstone, viz. Yet the veteran could not but notice that when the subject was alluded to, there was a sly smile on the young man's lips, as if there was some secret behind all this that he—the Colonel—was not a sharer in.

It was not long, however, before the owner of the Beeches was enlightened on this head.

As to Victoria Kemp and Sydney Cheilstone, both being young, good-looking, intellectual, accomplished and of similar tastes, what possible termination save one could there be to such an acquaintance? Sydney Cheilstone and Victoria Kemp were "over head and ears" in love with each other; and though no explanation had yet taken place between them, each was conscious of the truth.

For a day in mid-October the Colonel and Victoria had planned their last picnic of the year, and by permission of the ranger it was to take place in Windsor Great Park. The picnic was to be small and select and to consist of only fifteen or sixteen very intimate friends of the Colonel and his daughter.

For a more exquisite day than it turned out for this their last picnic for the season, it would have been impossible to wish. The whole of the party were charmed with the success of the undertaking. Never were there such champagne and such lobster salads, or such genial master and mistress of the ceremonies as the Colonel and his daughter. So declared everybody.

The eating part of the business was happily concluded; the Colonel and one or two of the older men were defying the rheumatism by lying at full length on the grass smoking their cigars, while as a matter of course, the younger members of the party had paired off and were talking all sorts of nonsense in couples.

Victoria Kemp and Sydney Cheilstone walking in one of the beautiful glades of the park, were at a considerable distance

from their companions, but they did not appear to be aware of the fact, or, if they were, it did not cost them any uneasiness.

They were laughingly discussing the mysterious letter of Mr. Cheilstone, viz. which had introduced his son to the household of the Kemps, and Victoria maintained that any one, after perusing it, would have supposed that a little boy or at the most a great growing lad, was about to be introduced on them.

Cheilstone smiled, and asked what had been her own opinion.

"Well, I confess," said Victoria, smiling, "that I fancied we were to receive a little fellow, aged, perhaps, some 12 years. So persuaded was I of it that I told the house-keeper to get ready a little room which has never been used since the death of my brother, and which contains a cot"—here she glanced merrily at his possible figure—"that you could not by any possibility have used."

"Oh, oh!" cried her amused listener. "Then how was it I found such a charming domicile awaiting me?"

"Why, we always kept a spare room ready for a chance arrival; and of course the butler when he had seen you, had sense enough to conduct you to the right apartment!"

"Ah, just so! And your father?"

"Oh, papa's idea was that we were to be troubled with a great hobbledehoy, who would eat enormously and—"

"Well, Miss Kemp, and—"

"It was only some of papa's nonsense, and, unless you insist—"

"I insist," said he, mischievously, looking full into her eyes.

"Well then, papa thought you might make love to the maids."

Sydney Cheilstone frowned for a moment and then laughed aloud.

"I am honored, I am sure! But listen, Victoria."

This was the first time he had ever called her by her Christian name, and, though, with instinctive subtlety, she knew perfectly well what was coming, and not too well what her reply would be, all her woman's modesty rushed to her aid and she said as if she had only then become aware of the fact.

"What a distance we have strayed from our party, Mr. Cheilstone! Had we not better return?"

"Not yet, I think," he answered, in a very tender but firm tone that she felt powerless to resist.

However, she made one more effort to escape hearing the very words she wished to hear; so she looked at her watch and said:

"Past five! We really must return to see the sun set over Woodlands; it is a lovely estate, and almost adjoins papa's. It is quite a sight to see the last rays of the sun on that magnificent range of copper beeches."

The young man smiled a curious smile.

"You admire Woodlands, then, Victoria?"

"Again 'Victoria!' This time the hot blood dyed her cheek and brow."

"Oh, yes, of course I do—anybody would! Its owner is only a year ago, and papa knew him well. We often visited there. It is a most lovely place."

"You do not know its present owner then?"

"No; he has not yet taken possession. All we know is that he is a gentleman who has lived much abroad. I dare say we shall become acquainted with him some day."

"I dare say you will."

"No doubt he is some crusty old nabob with a worn out liver, who lives on curries and mulligatawny soup, and who throws the dishes at the heads of his black servants."

"No doubt he is."

"But then, you must be civil to next-door neighbors, you know."

"Oh, of course! Good breeding enjoins that. But I do not fancy the new owner of Woodlands will be such an ogre as you imagine."

"Why not?"

"Possibly I have the honor of his acquaintance."

"You?"—and Victoria looked up at him with unfeigned surprise.

"What is there so extraordinary in that?" asked he, laughing.

"You do know the new owner of Woodlands, then?"

"He stands before you."

"Listen, Victoria, dearest," said the young man, taking both her hands. "You and your father have been the victims of a plot."

"A plot!" exclaimed the young lady; but she did not withdraw her hands.

"Yes; but before I tell you about it, I wish to ask you one question. We are neither of us children, we are neither of us, I think, likely to express our feelings in many words. You must have seen that I love you, Victoria, will you be my wife?"

It was a straightforward wooing indeed! No protestations—not a single unnecessary word! How different from the general run of lovers! But Victoria understood the straightforward, manly nature of Sydney Cheilstone; and admired his character, and she loved him. So she simply answered—

"Yes."

He put his arm around her and kissed her passionately.

"But about the plot, Sydney?" asked Victoria, after a brief interval.

"Oh, yes! Well, then, the letter was concocted expressly to deceive yourself and the Colonel."

"Oh!"

"Yes, dearest; the medical adviser who recommended me to pass two years in Europe was no other than myself. I was surgeon to the—th, as an army list would have shown the Colonel had he consulted it."

"To think we should have been deceived!"

"Yes, you fell into the trap easily. But, you see this was it. The late owner of Woodland, who, as you know, had neither kin nor kin, was my god-father, and at his death he bequeathed the estate and a large sum of money in funds to myself. Of course, upon this, I was determined to quit the army. While my father and myself were making inquiries about my property, it occurred to the owner of the adjoining estate, the Beeches, was no other than Colonel Kemp, my father's old comrade in arms."

"Ah!"

"Well, though my father and yours had not seen each other for some years, they had, occasionally corresponded; and so, when my match-making friend heard that Colonel Kemp had an only child—a daughter—he proposed a very pretty little scheme. It was neither more nor less than to join the two estates."

"It was very impertinent!" said Victoria, trying to appear angry.

"And I, I own."

"And I have a great mind to retract what I have said," she added with a charming smile.

"Ah, I am not afraid! But listen,

of course my father and I thought that if I announced myself as a man I should not be received at the Beeches as a permanent inmate, but that if we so worded the letter as to leave it in doubt—"

"Yes, yes; you know that, once our guest, we should not be so rude as to turn you out."

"That's just it. And now will you forgive me, Victoria?"

"For what?"

"For having descended to a subterfuge unworthy of a gentleman."

She looked up at him, her brown eyes full of a tender light.

"It was not a right thing to do," she said; "but I am the gainer by it, and so I forgive you, Sydney."

The young man took his pardon from her lips.

"But," added Victoria, "I don't know what papa will say to all this."

But, after having heard the story of his "ward" the Colonel came to the conclusion that "all's well that ends well."

Mrs. A. Nelson, Bradford, writes: I was a sufferer from Chronic Dyspepsia for eleven years. Always after eating, an intense burning sensation in the stomach, at times very distressing, causing a drooping and languid feeling, which would last for several hours after eating. I was recommended by Mr. Poppelwell, Chemist, of our city, to try Northrop & Lyman's Vegetable Discovery and Dyspeptic Cure, and I am thankful to say that I have not been better for years; that burning sensation and languid feeling has all gone, and food does not lie heavy on my stomach. Others of my family have used it with the best results."

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