

DAISY'S SERGEANT.

Fred W. Loring in Old and New for October.
(This story possesses an interest besides its intrinsic merits, as being one of the last productions of its brilliant and lamentable author.)

By a special order from the War Department, Capt. Bullington, Brigadier General of volunteers, was transferred from comparative peace and comfort, in one of our inland cities, to a remote military station, west of the Rocky Mountains. This military station was named Camp Jenkins, after the commander of a surveying expedition who established it. It had been established because there were Indians in its vicinity; the instant that it was established the noble red man faded away like morning mist, with the exception of a few who did washing for their oppressors. It was a lovely spot; it had cottonwood and willow trees standing on the banks of a rivulet of clear and sparkling spring water, and the parade ground was a magnificent lawn of velvety grass. Around this parade ground stood the quarters of the officers, the head, four cottages belonging to the officers and the surgeon; while the barracks and the guard-room completed three sides of the triangle, the fourth being left open, and showing a wonderful picture of purple mountains, barren and verdureless for thousands of feet, while the summits held pine forests, and fields of dazzling snow that flashed on the eyes even in the middle of aridity. Outside of Camp Jenkins, for miles around, were deserts of sage brush; inside was a natural landscape, that by contrast seemed a bit of a paradise. The inhabitants of this paradise were, at the opening of this story, in the Adamite condition as far as the absence of women were concerned. Mrs. Gen. Bullington had lately refused to accompany the General when she first heard the news of his transference to the West; afterwards, finding that the General was placidly preparing to go without her, she determined to follow. Imagine, then, the scene as I have described it at Camp Jenkins, while Gen. Bullington is discovered on the piazza in front of his cottage, just waked from his afternoon nap by the arrival of the daily mail. In his hand is an open letter, signed Matilda Bullington, which informs him that his wife will arrive a week after her letter.

"Crestle!" cried the General to his Lieutenant, who was crossing the parade ground; "look here, will you?" "Lieut. Crestle, formerly a Lieutenant Colonel of volunteers, not only looked there, as the General requested, but came there, and stood by the side of his commanding officer. He was a handsome and soldierly-looking fellow, dear to Gen. Bullington because he was brave, honorable, a graduate of West Point, and a Philadelphian. "Crestle," said the General, "my wife is coming next week." "So is mine," replied Crestle. "And the cottage is not in order; and the carpets are not down," said the General plaintively. "Here's the doctor."

"I have good news," said Dr. Gilbert; "my wife is coming next week." "It's a conspiracy!" said Gen. Bullington. "What do they all come together for? There will be a row here in two days." "That is an ungallant remark," said Dr. Gilbert.

"I can't help it," said Gen. Bullington; "Matilda is the best woman in the world; but when she comes—well, gentlemen, how do I pass my afternoons now?" "You sleep, and you go trouting," said Col. Crestle. "Well, after Matilda comes," said Gen. Bullington, "I shall go trouting altogether."

With these oracular words, Gen. Bullington ceased. Men were detailed to paper and carpet the officers' cottages; and a week after the General received his wife's letter, that lady was deposited at the door from the ambulance which had been sent to the railroad station, a trifling distance of sixteen miles, for her.

At the same time Mrs. Crestle awoke. The General knew who Mrs. Crestle was, and greeted her cordially. "Your husband will be here in a few minutes," he said, "I see you and my wife have traveled together part of the way, so that I suppose you are acquainted."

"We have not yet been introduced," said Mrs. Gen. Bullington severely. The General felt vaguely that there was a natural antagonism between Mrs. Crestle and his wife, and introduced them to each other. "I am happy to meet you, Mrs. Crestle," said Mrs. Gen. Bullington. "You are very kind," returned Mrs. Crestle. Mrs. Crestle was a small woman, Mrs. Bullington a large one, but size is not always victorious in feminine contests.

"Is your husband stationed here?" inquired Mrs. Bullington. "Yes, Mrs. Bullington," replied Mrs. Crestle. "Colonel Bullington was transferred to this place by the same order that sent your husband here."

"Ah!" remarked Mrs. Bullington, in a slightly surprised tone. "Is your husband a Colonel, then?"

"That is his volunteer rank," replied Mrs. Crestle, sweetly, "just as Brigadier General by brevet is Captain Bullington's, you know."

The skirmish had proved successful for Mrs. Crestle. Mrs. Bullington realized it, and wondered whether that audacious woman, as she inwardly designated Mrs. Crestle, would ever dare to address her as "Mrs. Captain Bullington." As for the General, he felt that there had been a battle, though he could not comprehend how it had been fought.

The arrival of Col. Crestle, who was affectionately greeted by his wife, suspended hostilities for a time, and the couples went into dinner. Now, what Mrs. Bullington said to the General at dinner, only she and her husband knew; but, after dinner was over, the General was seen with his fishing-tackle making his way to the trout stream. Two days after this, Mrs. Dr. Gilbert arrived; and with her came her sister-in-law, Daisy Gilbert. Daisy Gilbert was uncommonly pretty. She had curls around and daisy-like fluttering around and across her face. She was lithe and graceful, though petite. She had considerable independence of character. She seldom asked advice, and still more seldom took it. She was, in a word, a spirited little beauty.

By the time of her arrival there was a distinctly recognized hostility between Mrs. Gen. Bullington and Mrs. Crestle. They still greeted each other politely enough; but Col. Crestle did not smoke an after-dinner cigar, as formerly, on the piazza of Gen. Bullington's cottage; and a distinct boundary line seemed now to be drawn between the respective premises of the two gentlemen.

first place only did it inspire the two unmarried Lieutenants with a wild passion, which made them drill their men for the most part directly under her windows, especially when a right or left wheel was desired. Thereby Daisy's lawn was injured, and her temper slightly ruffled. But strong as was Mrs. Crestle's effect upon the gentlemen, still more marked and intense was the impression she produced upon the ladies. Mrs. Gen. Bullington remarked to Mrs. Crestle that Daisy was so gentle and modest. Mrs. Crestle replied in acquiescence with Mrs. Bullington, intimating that a chief charm of Daisy was that she never gave herself any airs. To this Mrs. Bullington retorted that Miss Gilbert wasn't always "working and contriving to gain gentlemen's attention, Mrs. Crestle!" and Mrs. Crestle responded that she wasn't so old that she had to exert herself to do so. The ladies were fast becoming a little broad and elegant in their manner of scratching each other, being so far removed from civilization. Each looked on Daisy as an affronted angel. Daisy, on the other hand, would not ally herself to either the Bullington or the Crestle faction; though she was a great pet with the General, and accepted numberless little attentions from Col. Crestle.

Now, one day, when it happened that Daisy and Mrs. Crestle were on Mrs. Bullington's piazza together, a Sergeant came up with a message to the General, which he delivered and went away.

"What a handsome soldier!" said Daisy.

"Is he?" said Gen. Bullington.

"My dear," said Mrs. Bullington, "you really ought not to notice a common soldier."

"He wasn't a common soldier," said Daisy; "for he had braids on his arm."

"The principle is the same," said Mrs. Bullington.

"But he was handsome," insisted Daisy; and Mrs. Crestle laughed. But Mrs. Bullington did not laugh.

She delivered a sort of lecture upon the evils which might arise from young ladies looking at young people of the opposite sex; and then, with swift feminine logic, asserted that such evils would be avoided when there was a social inequality between the looker on and the looked on. Daisy stood there, very pretty and slightly vexed, pulling a bouquet to pieces, as the calm stream of Mrs. Bullington's discourse meandered gently on. Again the Sergeant appeared, and stood before them. Daisy saw him look at her admiringly, and colored; then she observed that his eye fell upon the flowers she held.

Suddenly, without abruptly, she held them out to him.

"Do you like flowers?" she asked.

"If you do, you can have them." And the Sergeant bowed, and glanced expressively at her—his eye was blue and expressive—and then he walked away.

"My dear," began Mrs. Bullington; and then she stopped; utterance failed her.

"Well," said Mrs. Crestle, "has that Sergeant made a conquest of you, Daisy? First you called him handsome; then you gave him flowers; what will you do next?"

"Oh! I was that the same Sergeant?" said the little humbug, innocently.

"Of course it was," replied Mrs. Crestle.

"I think you are mistaken, Mrs. Crestle," said Mrs. Gen. Bullington, with dignity.

"Oh, come now!" said Gen. Bullington indignantly; "let us drop the Sergeant."

And so the Sergeant was dropped. But some three or four days afterward, as the same people were sitting in the same spot, Col. Crestle said:

"There is going to be a ball to-morrow night."

"A ball?" said Daisy, suddenly brightened up.

"Yes," said Col. Crestle; "a ball over at Porter's Gap. Shall we go?"

"Oh, yes!" said Daisy; "by all means."

"Why Ned," said Mrs. Crestle, "just think what you are proposing! There will be miners and all sorts of dreadful creatures there; and it's fifteen miles away from here. Our going is quite out of the question."

"I think you are mistaken, Mrs. Crestle," said Mrs. Bullington. "It is possible for us to go, and I for one should enjoy it. General, we will go, and will take Daisy with us."

"Very well," said the General submissively.

Now, Mrs. Gen. Bullington did not wish to go to the ball at Porter's Gap, and only the controversial spirit inspired her to do so. But, of course, it was impossible for her to recede from her position; and so, on the appointed evening, she and Daisy, together with Gen. Bullington and Dr. Gilbert, entered the huge mountain wagon belonging to the camp, and started for Porter's Gap. Just as they entered that flourishing settlement, Dr. Gilbert was recognized, and carried off to attend to a sick person; near so that the Bullingtons and Daisy entered the dining-room of the Gulch House, where the ball was to take place, alone.

The dining-room was certainly not an imposing apartment. The ceiling was low and smoky; the walls, unlike those in most of the houses at Porter's Gulch, were papered, but with paper so hideous in its design and color as to make the spectator (regard that the latter had a plaster which had, at all events, the merit of simplicity) were hidden from view. Dancing had already begun when the Bullington party entered. The room was crowded; there were three sets of "plain cotillions"—wonderfully plain, Daisy thought, with a shudder—already on the floor; while forty-three young men with large hands and feet, who were unable to secure partners, sat grimly in the seats which were placed on all four sides of the ball-room. Such a motley assemblage as that! Fat women, gaunt women, gray-haired women, and little girls among the dancers; and a grandmother, if Daisy had only known it, was executing that interesting and beautiful figure known as the "ladies' chain" with her granddaughter.

At one end of the room the orchestra sat in state, composed of a melodeon, a violin, a guitar, a cornet, and a base trumpet. The performers of these various instruments seemed to have various ideas of time and tune, and continually indulged in little departures from the key in which they were playing. The blast of the trumpet was not sustained, but intermittent, when it did occur, however, it was so powerful as to entirely drown everything else. In spite of the confusion and noise, the entrance of the two ladies excited an amount of attention calculated to delight both ladies had they been voraciously craving of masculine admiration. The "plain cotillon" soon reached its end, and several men thereupon rushed toward Mrs. Bullington and Daisy.

"The next dance," said one of the roughest-looking of these, "is a waltz. May I have the honor, marm?"

"Sir," said Mrs. Bullington, in mingled anger and disdain, "I do not do waltz."

"I'll learn you how, marm," said the man, with a persistence worthy of a better object.

"I do not dance with strangers," said Mrs. Bullington, with increased severity.

"You'd better, marm," said the man persuasively. "Women are scarce hereabouts, and we'd like to have you and your daughter there to trot out a little. We don't want no folks here that won't dance."

In spite of the presence of General Bullington, poor Daisy felt a little frightened. She did not want to dance with a man whose pistol and bow-knife were his most striking features. Just as she was sitting there, perplexed and confused, hardly realizing what the various men about her were trying to say, the tone of a man's voice, whose name she did not know, pleased her. She struck her ear. Now, when the feminine ear is struck by the tones of a man's voice, the feminine eye turns to look at the owner of the voice. The voice said—

"Why, Miss Gilbert, this is a pleasant surprise. Don't you remember me—Harry Curran?"

And Daisy looked, in accordance with the law which we have just enunciated, and recognized him. Then she gave a little gasp, and looked at Mrs. Bullington, and saw that she did not recognize him.

"May I reintroduce you to my acquaintance by a waltz, Miss Gilbert?" said Mr. Harry Curran; and Daisy said "yes," and they left Mrs. Bullington, and in an instant his arm was around her supple waist, and off they went, all fire, and grace and beauty, in spite of the melodeon and the trumpet, exciting admiration even in the stupid louts around the room before she stopped, and then she said, "Of course you must explain your conduct, Sergeant."

"I owe it to you, I know," said Mr. Curran, "but I wish you could trust me enough, and believe I am sufficient of a gentleman for you to forget my real position. It came over here without my knowledge, and if I am discovered, I am disgraced. I saw that those men troubled you, and I hoped to help you out of your difficulty."

"What did you come over here for?" said Daisy.

"For the same reason that you did," said the Sergeant; "and yet that was not my only reason."

"What was it, then?" said Daisy, impatiently.

"Because you came," said the Sergeant boldly; and then he colored.

"You are no Sergeant," said Daisy.

"At least, you talk to me as I have heard other young gentlemen—no, I don't mean that—who are you?"

"Don't ask me, please, Miss Gilbert," said the Sergeant. "My life has been a ruin and a waste; my brilliant and beautiful prospects have been worse than crushed, and now I am simply Sergeant Butler, except to-night, when I try to forget what I am, and return to what I was. This waltz is over; may I dance with you again?"

"But Mrs. Bullington will detect you, I am afraid," said Daisy.

"Not a bit," said the Sergeant gayly. "Introduce me and see."

And straightway Daisy did so.

Daisy looked at Mrs. Bullington, reflectively. "Curran, Curran. Your face seems familiar. Are you any relative of Mrs. Joseph Curran of Philadelphia—a charming woman, and a very dear friend of mine?"

"I am her husband's nephew," said Mr. Harry Curran, with a bow.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Bullington; "I thought your face seemed familiar. Can you tell me much he reminds me of Joseph Curran?"

"Very," said the General.

"You must take good care of Daisy to-night," said Mrs. Bullington, blandly. "The child is passionately fond of dancing, and enjoys the picturesque element she finds among these people. Only the other day she quite went into raptures over such a common-place looking Sergeant at the camp—said he was handsome; so ridiculous, you know."

The child upon this blushed vividly, and hastily said it was time for the next dance; upon which Mr. Curran checked the flow of Mrs. Bullington's conversation by carrying Daisy off.

"Are you really Mr. Joseph Curran's nephew?" asked Daisy.

"Certainly," said Mr. Curran.

Daisy looked carefully at him. He seemed handsome; but she fancied his look had a little exaltation in it.

"Do you know who the handsome Sergeant at the camp is?" she asked, and had the pleasure of seeing a shade of doubt appear in his expression.

"No, I do not," he said. "Has he a moustache?"

"Oh no," replied Daisy; "a full beard and taller and darker than you are. And I only said he was handsome to tease Mrs. Bullington."

"Will you do me a favor?" asked Mr. Curran.

"Perhaps," said Daisy. "What is it?"

"When Mrs. Bullington is ready to leave, delay her a little," replied Mr. Harry Curran, "until we can start ahead of them, and get back to the camp in time."

Now, at this moment the wrath of Mrs. General Bullington was aroused. She sat and looked upon the throng, but mingled not with them. Now, besides the "caller," who stood mounted on a platform behind the melodeon, and by the side of the trumpet, was a bottle and a tumbler; and in the bottle was the national beverage, whisky. Agreeably exhilarated by the national beverage, the natural wit and humor of the caller of the figures began to find vent. Accordingly he varied his calls from the dull and stereotyped routine. Instead of "Lady forward, and swing opposite gentleman, and balance to fourth gentleman," he cried, "Lady forward, and swing the handsomest man in the room, and then balance to the man she loves best." This filled the bosom of Mrs. Gen. Bullington with disgust, and when Daisy and Mr. Curran returned, she announced her intention of leaving "this disgraceful scene." But Daisy teased for just one dance more, and Mr. Curran seconded her; and so she went out for the Virginia Reel. Mrs. Bullington saw the figures of ungainly men and calico-dressed belles go spinning about, and grew thoroughly glad that Mrs. Crestle was not present to exult in her discomfiture. Very long indeed the dance seemed to her, and very much astonished she was when Daisy appeared alone beside her.

"Why, where is Mr. Curran?" she asked; and Daisy explained that he had been called away. Then Mrs. Bullington rose to go; but Daisy was such a long time getting ready that she grew quite impatient and the General quite sleepy. And then, when they were all

seated in the ambulance, Daisy found she had forgotten her fan, and it was absolutely necessary to go back and get it. But at last they reached the camp, and Daisy broke the silence which had oppressed them with the words:

"I quit! Oh, I'm glad!"

"Of course you are quite safe, you foolish child," said Mrs. General Bullington. "You had better go straight to bed. You have been dancing too much." And Daisy thought perhaps she had, though she did not say anything, but went slowly, very slowly, to sleep.

"To-morrow morning," she thought, "when he comes, as he probably will, to the General's cottage with some messages, he will not find me there, and that will disappoint him. And when he does see me he will smile from under his mustache—his mustache is certainly very becoming—and I shall look very blank. How disappointed he will be!" And so Daisy began to dream.

The next day found Daisy very fretful and disappointed. Cause—her plans had failed. In the first place, she had not come in the morning; in the second place, when he did come, in the afternoon, he did not smile from under his mustache, partly because his mustache was shaved off, and partly because, having flirted occasionally in his life before, he was prepared for a feminine reaction on the part of Daisy from the graciousness of her behavior on the preceding night.

But the next day General Bullington, who had made a pet in every way of Daisy, blindly became an instrument in the hands of Providence.

"My dear," said he, "I have found a horse in the camp that will just suit you. Horse-back riding will do you good."

"Oh! it will be lovely," cried Daisy, joyously; and then, as an afterthought, added, "but I can go alone, General."

"That is true," said the General. "I have told Sergeant Butler to act as your escort. He is a good, honest sort of a fellow—very trustworthy; and, while he rides behind you, you can feel quite safe."

"I should feel safe, I know, General," said Daisy, demurely; "but would it be proper?"

"Proper! Oh, forgot all that!" said the General. "I forgot all about that. I'll ask Matilda."

Matilda, on being asked, and on hearing casually that Mrs. Crestle had said it would be improper, immediately expressed her opinion that Mrs. Crestle was a fool.

"If it were with a Lieutenant," said Mrs. General Bullington, decisively, "objections could be raised. But what is a Sergeant? The idea is absurd."

"I suppose," said the General, "on a pleasant morning in May, Daisy and Sergeant Butler started together for the mountains. The scenery was barren, the foliage mostly sagebrush; yet Daisy felt that she was going to enjoy her ride. She glanced furtively at the Sergeant, who looked rigidly proper.

He did not speak; he was attentive, obedient, energetic; so Daisy herself finally made a remark.

"I suppose General Bullington told you that you were to ride out with me whenever I wanted to go?"

"Yes, miss," said the Sergeant.

"Now don't talk in that stiff way," said Daisy, "when you know I know better. Please don't be a Sergeant, Mr. Curran."

"Very well, then," said Mr. Curran, becoming easily and suddenly, "if you are so kind as to let me be my old self."

"Why, of course," said Daisy. "Sergeants are not interesting."

"Thanks for the implied compliment."

"Don't suppose that I imply anything," said Daisy. "Only please tell me your story."

"I have none to tell," said Mr. Curran.

"Oh, very well, then!" said Daisy, and pouted. She could pout.

"Well, really, Miss Gilbert," said Mr. Curran, "there is little to tell. I was born at an early age."

"You can skip that," said Daisy.

"Well, then," continued Mr. Curran, "I was engaged to be married by my uncle, who has taken care of me since my parents died, and whose fortune I was to inherit. Now it is a good thing to be engaged. My uncle and myself were agreed on that point, but we differed on another."

"And that was?" asked Daisy.

"And that was the woman to be selected. As I was going to marry for myself and not for my uncle, I remonstrated. Remonstrance made a row, and I enlisted for three years. The lady's question is married; my uncle is ready to welcome me back; but I insist on serving out my time, which lasts about five months longer. Now, won't you tell me your story?"

"Mine!" cried Daisy. "Why, nothing ever happened to me."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Mr. Harry Curran; then there was silence for a little while.

"It was curious the way we first met, wasn't it?" said Daisy.

"Very," said Mr. Curran.

"So, after this, Daisy rode out frequently with her Sergeant; and as people generally mind their own business west of the Mississippi, nothing was said, except by the private soldiers, who naturally envied their comrade's luck. But one July, when Gen. Bullington sat, radiant in Panama hat and linen duster, under the cottonwood trees on the bank of the creek, endeavoring to beguile some unwary fish, he heard the steps of horses, and he heard voices. The voices were soft and low. Daisy looked and saw Daisy and her Sergeant; and he heard them call each other "Daisy" and "Harry." His first impression was that he was dreaming; then, as he listened in astonishment to what they were saying, he felt very young for a few seconds; and then, with an elephantine bound that threw his fishing-pole out into the creek, he sprang to his feet and cried out, "Stop!"

They stopped. They were on the opposite side of the creek; and the General was forced to elevate his voice slightly, so that the tableau was not entirely impressive.

"What said the General, sternly, "does all this mean?"

Then Daisy began to cry, and the Sergeant tried to explain in a straightforward and manly way; and the General felt himself growing steadily younger, and finally said,

"You needn't say anything more. I don't know about such things myself, but come over to my house immediately on your return to camp."

And the pair rode off, and the General walked off slowly to his home.

"I never was mixed up with anything romantic before," said Daisy to herself; "and I never will be again. What right has a Sergeant to be no Sergeant at all? And what will Matilda say?"

This was what Matilda said. She advanced smilingly to meet her husband, and said:

"What a charming little romance this is!"

"What!" said the General; "you like it?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Bullington; "it is an excellent match. Why, General, he will come into half a million. And the wedding is to be here in camp. His thing is up in seven weeks now."

The General sat down and wiped his forehead. "Well," said he, "I do not understand women."

"This is an absolute fact."

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