

UNCLE NAT'S FIRST LOVE.

Sweet Nettie Garnett was my school-mate. Most of them were prettier than Nettie, and dressed more stylishly; but Nettie's unconscious grace and sweet disposition won the admiration and respect of all her friends and almost put me beside myself with love for her. But because of my extreme bashfulness I lost many pleasant talks and walks with Nettie, which opportunities were gladly improved by Phil Clayton, who was my friend and desk-mate, though how I envied him his place by Nettie's side!

One cloudy morning Phil brought Nettie to school as usual, but left her at the school-room door, saying: "I have to go to the depot to-day to meet my cousin, but if it snows I'll call 'round this evening." And it did snow, thick and fast, all day long. School was dismissed a half-hour earlier than usual on account of the bad walking. It was a half-mile out of my way to take Nettie home; but what did I care! She was alone, and I made up my mind to take her home if it killed me. Fortunately I had my umbrella, and, walking up to her as she stood irresolutely on the step, I asked her in a trembling voice if I might see her home.

"Thank you," she said, looking for all the world as if she wanted to laugh, "but it is so far out of your way that I do not like to trouble you."

"It is no trouble," I replied, "and it would really be too bad to let you undertake the walk alone." And before I knew it I was holding my umbrella over Nettie and was boldly wading the snow by her side, with her little brown hand in its crimson mitten tucked snugly under my arm.

I was supremely happy and wished the walk would never end, but blushed and stammered every time she spoke to me, and scarcely drew a long breath till I had safely reached my own home. I awoke the next morning with a determination to conquer my horrid bashfulness. The snow had ceased falling and the snow shovels had been along early. This time I thoroughly enjoyed my walk with Nettie, and was, afterward, almost her constant companion, Phil Clayton's pretty, saucy cousin being all, and more, than he could attend to. School ended at last and summer came. I often went to see Nettie, and in a boy's careless, awkward way, paid her compliments and helped her about her work.

By and by I was to start for college. I did not like to do without Nettie, but was anxious to show her what a man I could make of myself. I went over to bid her good-by that evening before I left, and found her in the kitchen, washing the supper dishes. I volunteered to help her and we were soon through.

"I am going away to-morrow, Nettie," I remarked, carelessly, as we walked in the moonlight.

"So soon?" she asked, raising her brown eyes to my face.

"Shall you miss me?" I asked.

"Miss you! How could I help it?" she exclaimed.

I was trying awfully hard to ask her to wait for me, but became confused, and, hurriedly kissing her, went away.

When at home and safely locked within my own room I began strutting up and down before the mirror, and smoothing my downy upper lip with all the affection I might have smoothed Nettie's curls. I think I must have resembled a young peacock, and could Nettie have seen me then how she would have laughed at me for my assumed airs and graces! I was always very humble and demure in her presence, hating myself the moment I was alone for letting her "come it over me so."

I did not like college at first. The professors were very strict with us, and we had to apply ourselves to books more than I liked, but in due time I graduated with all the honors and a very good opinion of myself.

When I arrived home I inquired for Nettie at once. No city belle ever spent more time or care in making her toilet than I did that evening. I brushed my teeth till my gums were sore; oiled and arranged my curls in the most becoming style; waxed and perfumed my mustache; squeezed my feet into a pair of boots two numbers too small for me; adorned myself in a suit of glossy black broadcloth, black satin tie, a collar so stiff I could scarcely bend my head, diamond shirt-studs and sleeve-buttons. I attached a little ring of gold with pearl setting to my watch-chain, soaked a bottle and a half of musk into my vest front and coat collar, where Nettie's head would rest when I took her in my arms. Then setting my plug hat on my curls and drawing on my rose-tinted kid gloves, I took my little bamboo cane adorned with a gold chain and pink satin bow and departed, arranging a pink, musk-bedewed silk.