



"Forbear to call him blest
That only boasts a large estate;
Were I so tall to reach the pole,
Or grasp the ocean with my span,
I must be measured by my soul:—
The mind's the standard of the man."
—Watts.

The Wedding Day.

"In sickness and in health
Till death us do part."

Such a bare little place! cold, and dark and comfortless as a room well nigh innocent of furniture must be, yet sweet and clean and orderly, and, above all, home to old sick Molly and Timothy her husband.

"Bring her over at once, then, and the sooner the better; perhaps this will make the journey easier," said the doctor, as he laid a shilling on the table, and breathed a sigh of relief.

He had come ready prepared to meet the hundred and one difficulties and objections usually put forward in such a case, but the convincing arguments had been all unneeded, for Molly had risen to the occasion bravely, and had consented to become an in-patient at the big hospital across the park that very day. So, his task successfully accomplished, the doctor turned to leave the room.

"Might it be to-night?" It was Timothy who spoke. "I'll bring her for certain to-night, but we'd like to have just this one day together, first."

Now, the doctor was quick-tempered, and feeling impatient at any suggestion of delay, he answered rather sharply:

"No, no, bring her at once as I told you; why, the sooner she is in, the sooner she will be out again, you know; what objections can you have?"

Timothy hesitated, but a glance at Molly's thin face and a certain eager wishfulness upon it gave him courage.

"It's only this, sir, and it may seem a poor sort of reason to you, but this is our wedding-day, we've never spent it apart yet—and—" the old voice faltered, and the sentence was never finished, for the young man himself interrupted it:—

"Reason! why it's the very best of reasons, if you had only said so at once! Bring her to-night, then, by all means; good-bye till then."

And as he went on his way amid the busy London streets, the doctor thought of a time, not perhaps so very far off now, when with love and friends, and plenty all around, he too should keep his wedding-day. And it may be, that as he thought, the joy in his own heart was none the less intense and sacred because there came mingling with it a remembrance of some of the chastening possibilities of life, and a feeling of kindly sympathy with some other travellers on its road, for whom the end of the journey together could not be far distant now.

Left alone with his wife, Timothy seated himself beside her, and patted her hand encouragingly.

"Hospitals are such fine places, Moll." "Very fine, dear," and she looked at him with the smile whose sunshine had made life bright to him for so long.

"Such splendid food and nursing, Moll, and the rooms! why, I'm only afraid you'll be looking down on this poor little place when you come back to it after a bit so well and strong; for its wonderful how well folks do get in those hospitals, Moll, quite wonderful."

"Yes, Timothy, so they do, very often."

Her lips trembled, but only for a moment. Then, with a brave attempt at cheerfulness, she continued:

"But Tim, my man, it's getting on,

and we're wasting such precious time, shan't we begin?"

And drawing nearer still, Timothy began. It was an old, old custom with them now. Year after year as the day came round they had kept it together in the same simple fashion, though never before in such a room, or with so little to help the keeping. Formerly the little anniversary festival had been as a sort of happy duet between them, each in turn reviving some sweet old memory or cherished recollection, the precious gleanings of a long married life, too dear and sacred for the common handling of every-day use, and only lovingly and tenderly brought out on such a day as this to be dwelt on, ay, perhaps wept over, too, but with those blessed and healing tears from which all pain and bitterness have long since passed away.

To-day, however, Timothy had it all his own way, for Molly said little, only lay back and smiled contentedly, or shook her head gently as the case demanded, while she listened once more to the old familiar story that time only seemed to make more dear.

And Timothy told of the happy courting days, happy though wise folks had shaken their heads and had augured ill of this foolish marriage; of a certain April morning when a dull old London church had seemed so still and solemn, and yet so strangely bright; of the friends—and he named them one by one—who had collected at her home near by to wish them well; and at last of that real home-coming, the settling down in the poor little attic rooms which his love and thought had made so sweet and snug and cosy.

"And the violets," she put in quickly, "don't forget the violets, Tim."

"Aye, the violets, I pinned them on myself, didn't I? The sweetest breast knot I could find for the sweetest lass in all the world to me."

He paused again and she watched him keenly, anxiously.

"Yes, Moll," he resumed presently, "don't let us shirk it, old girl; then—" but his voice sounded strange, and she could barely catch the words, "then came that grand first dinner-party of ours; you and me for guests, and fish—"

fried fish it was, with potatoes, fried potatoes—and I don't know what besides, and you laughed so because I couldn't help to cook them, do you remember, Moll? Do you remember?" and throwing back his head, Timothy burst suddenly into a laugh so strange and wild that it well-nigh tore poor Molly's heart in two. Then, as suddenly ceasing, he buried his face in his hands and sobbed as though his heart must break, while the quiet tears ran down his old cheeks too, and what could she say to comfort him?

For nine-and-thirty years that little anniversary feast had been celebrated so worthily, every item of that happy first meal together repeated, and now!

"Oh, my Moll, my Moll," he sobbed, "you must go without it to-day. I've no money left, not even a penny; poor girl, my poor old girl."

She dared not trust herself to speak, only stroked the grey head softly, tenderly.

Suddenly he raised it, and looking not at her but at the doctor's shilling, he pointed eagerly to it.

"Moll!"

But she shook her head sadly.

"It was for the cab, Tim. There is neither train nor bus to help me, and I must go in, you know."

He sat still once more lost in thought. Then jumping up excitedly he stood before her, and spoke fast and eagerly.

"Moll! think! You know the park, quite near? Could you with my arm, my strong arm, dear, could you walk to its gates? You could? Then listen, Moll: 'I'll carry you through, it's not far, and then, why then, it's but a step on the other side to the hospital door, do you see, old woman, do you see?'"

Moll nodded, but looked confused. The nod, however, apparently satisfied him, for he offered no further explanation, only asked if she minded being left by herself for a bit, and then, smiling mysteriously, disappeared.

Left alone, Molly lay still, too tired and weak to wonder much at anything while her mind wandered dreamily back again over the pages, of that old life story whose joys and sorrows seemed to-day to have become so strangely merged in one; till at last she remembered no more, the tired eyes closed wearily, and calmly and peacefully old Molly slept.

Timothy's re-entrance awakened her and she smiled a welcome.

He came forward eagerly, his old face flushed and glad, his little body bent half double over the covered tray his shaking arms were carrying so proudly; a tray from which there issued forth the all-pervading smell, appetizing or sickening as the case may be, of—fried fish!

"Shut your eyes tight, old girl, just for a few moments," he cried out; and still beaming from ear to ear, Tim brought forward the little round table, placed it near Molly's chair, and softly and quickly proceeded to lay it. Fish! potatoes! bread! butter! tea! milk! Why, what more could king or queen desire? And all from the marvellous possibilities of one bright shilling! Then, diving into the mysterious depths of a back pocket, Timothy produced therefrom a little bunch of violets, crushed indeed and faded, but sweet still, and bending softly over Moll he gently fastened them on her breast. Then seating himself opposite to her he told her eagerly she might "look."

Her unaffected surprise was rich reward indeed.

"It's your cab, dear heart," he cried. "Your cab! you couldn't use it and a riding-horse too, could you? and here's your horse all saddled and ready. It's quite right and square, Moll, he added quickly, as he caught sight of an expression of doubt on her honest face. "Didn't the doctor say it was to make the journey easier? and won't it, old girl, won't it? Ah, I thought that would settle it."

Whatever she may have felt, Molly had not the heart to object any further, and so the wedding-feast proceeded.

Timothy picked out the daintiest and most tempting morsels he could find, and for his sake she did her best bravely, but it was hard work. Everything tasted so strangely to-day; even the blessed cup of tea seemed to have lost the magic of its strengthening and reviving powers, and at length all further effort impossible, she waved off the last proffered morsel and lying back wearily, shook her head.

"Eat it yourself, you don't cheat fair, my man; and, ah Tim," she added sadly, "you've forgotten after all, for that day you drank our health in a glass of beer."

Timothy had expected this and was not to be taken at unawares.

"Beer!" he answered unblushingly, "ah, yes, to be sure, so I did; and I was just thinking as I came along how tastes change. Why, there's something almost unpleasant to me in the very idea now! So to-day if you please, my lass, I'll just drink your health in tea."

Molly said nothing. Only, for a few

minutes the room seemed dim and misty, and life was very sweet.

And so, once more that wedding feast was kept.

A little later, just as the short spring day was drawing to its close, the few pedestrians hurriedly wending their homeward way across that quiet bit of the Park, paused for a moment to gaze at a somewhat unusual sight. It was that of a little old man, weak and tottering himself, but pushing bravely and steadily on with eyes firmly fixed on the still far distant gates, and carrying on his back, her thin arms clasped about his neck, her hands firmly grasped in his, an old sick woman, Molly, his wife.

Hearts are kind, and more than one friendly offer of help had been given to Timothy, but though grateful for the offers he had seemed almost impatient at the delay and declining all assistance, had plodded quietly on again.

He could hardly have told how often he had stopped to rest since first that strange journey had been begun; certainly each time that the shelter of a friendly seat had been gained, often of necessity when there had been no such help at hand. Somehow he had fancied himself so much stronger than had proved to be the case, for it surely could not be that Molly was heavier than he had imagined, and she so weak and ill.

At first her cough had been terribly bad, and it had torn and hurt him so to hear it; but of late it had seemed to get better and at last it had ceased altogether, and very gratefully Timothy had thanked God for that. A few moments ago they had stopped to rest again for the last time and he had questioned her tenderly as to how she did. Her face looked paler he thought, but she seemed easy and happy, and she had smiled so sweetly at him as she answered rather drowsily, "quite comfortable, Timothy, only very sleepy; good-night, my man," and he had kissed her lips tenderly and reverently as he always did, and then cheered and comforted had once more pushed on.

Ah! there were the Park gates almost reached at last, and indeed it was time, for his old arms ached terribly and his old knees threatened to fail him altogether. He spoke encouragingly to her from time to time, but she had evidently fallen asleep, for she did not answer him. It was better so, he thought, for now she could not guess how tired he was, and it would have hurt and vexed her sorely had she known it; his good old loving Moll!

Only a few more weary steps and the gates were really gained. Passing through them on they went, these two strange travellers, and the little band of urchins in their wake noticed that just before the great door of the hospital came in sight the old man panted more and more, and his poor little stock of strength seemed almost exhausted.

Yes, the labor of love was all but over now; one more effort and the goal was reached. Worn and weary, and spent with fatigue, but still clasping tight that precious burden Timothy stumbled up the last steep steps, and as friendly arms drew him into the safe shelter of that fire-lit hall, and kindly faces looked pityingly into his, the place seemed suddenly to become confused and misty, the voices to recede further and further away, till at last, wrapped in a merciful unconsciousness, he remembered no more.

Faithful unto death; his task was done; that kiss in the Park had indeed sealed their last good-bye, and his loving old arms had held her to the end. For, as they gently unclasped her arms