

## RONDEAU.

She smiled on me! A glorious light  
Flashed from her eyes so blue and bright—  
The light of happiness and love;  
Yet coyly, for the lashes wave  
A veil to hide the flame from sight.

And she shrank back from me in fright,  
Afraid of love, seemed bent on flight;  
Yet, coyly playing with her glove,  
She smiled on me!

And I took courage for the fight;  
And from her fear I drank new might,  
And for my cause I boldly strove  
In moving words; and from above  
Gazing on her, felt with delight  
She smiled on me!

## NEMOROSA.

## I.

"A landscape painter leads a merry life. He has the wide world for his studio and nature herself for his mistress and model: a smiling mistress, a patient and silent model, whose caprices, however discouraging they may be, are never exasperating or senseless like those of the human subject. He can count upon a kind welcome wherever he may roam, and it is seldom that he fails to meet with a joyous comrade or two. He has the sunshine and the free air and an abundance of exercise to keep him in health. He is independent, in a word, which is the secret of all true happiness. There you have the one side of the medal: the reverse is less glittering. Independence is a very fine thing; but it is a luxury, and like other luxuries has to be paid for. If the *Salon* looks coldly upon landscapes, and the public declines to buy them, your poor landscape painter is in a fair way to become independent of all earthly requirements by means of the simple process of starvation. All things considered I don't complain of my trade. You may say what you please about low forms of art, but what I maintain is that no form of art can be low, though every kind of artist can be easily enough. What do you make of Luca della Robbia may I ask? And which do you think is the greater man—Bernard Palissy or that ass Brouillon, who flatters himself that he is a modern Michel Angelo and has never produced a picture yet that has not been out of drawing? Low form of art, indeed! Stuff, my good sir!"

Victor Berthon could claim some acquaintance with the subject upon which he descended so fluently, having been himself a landscape painter for a matter of eight years, and having reaped but a meagre result from his labors. So meagre indeed had it been, that he had at last made up his mind to accept an offer which he had more than once rejected, and to bind himself to execute a certain number of studies annually for the manufactory of pottery at Montigny, which had become, and is becoming, more and more widely known to lovers of ceramic excellence. Nobody answered his questions or disputed the conclusiveness of his arguments for the sufficient reason that nobody but himself heard them. He was wandering among the hills and glades of the forests of Fontainebleau, with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his loose velvet coat, and his pipe for his sole confidant, and in spite of the expostulatory tone of his soliloquy—which might have seemed to imply that the step which he had taken stood in some need of justification—there was a good-humored and contented smile about this eyes and lips such as might be expected to irradiate the countenance of one who saw his way to a clear seven hundred francs a month for the future.

"Pots and jugs and plates!" he mused. "There was a time when I should have thought it a very long way beneath me to paint such things; but there was a time when I was a young fool and mistook myself for a genius. At thirty, one has pretty nearly done with illusions."

Convinced of his wisdom pertaining to that advanced age M. Berthon plunged more deeply into reflections and projects, and more deeply into the shady wilderness. He had no more fear of losing his way in the latter than in the former; for the locality had been known to him for many years past, as indeed it is to most French artists of his school. As however he had on all previous occasions fixed his headquarters at Barbison, and as Montigny happens to be situated at the opposite extremity of the forest, a good five miles away from the village, it was hardly surprising that toward sundown he should suddenly have awoken to the conviction that he had not the remotest idea of where he was.

The spot where he made this unpleasant discovery was an irregularly-shaped clearing where four grassy bridle paths met; and while he was twisting his mustache in perplexity, and wondering which of these was the most likely to lead him to his destination, he caught sight of something white flitting among the trees a hundred yards or so away; which something, approaching rapidly, developed itself into the tall figure of a girl. Swinging her straw hat in her hand, she was passing from light to shade with long, easy steps, and was evidently sure enough of her whereabouts to be independent of beaten tracks. Presently she emerged upon the open space and then for the first time becoming aware of the handsome young gentleman in the velvet coat and high-crowned wide-awake who was gazing at her with admiring eyes, stopped short and looked him full in the face.

Victor Berthon's eyes had every right and reason to express admiration. This young wood-nymph, with her golden-brown hair, her blue eyes and her slim, lithe form, would under any circumstances have been a specimen of humanity worth the looking at; but just now the accident of her slightly startled pose and the natural accessories of light and background combined to produce an effect especially delightful to the aesthetic soul. From the thicket at her back rose the straight trunks of some ancient Scotch firs, slate-colored at their base and reddening toward their summit; a fiery ray of sunlight falling aslant through the dense foliage overhead caught her hair and converted it into the semblance of a nimbus; her left hand, which held her hat, hung by her side, but her right was still uplifted, holding back a spray of the undergrowth through which she had come; and during the second or two that she stood thus, one of those bewildering recollections which come and go like a flash of lightning passed through the artist's mind. The memory, if such had been, was dispelled by the movement of its subject, who stepped forward, saying in a clear and pleasant voice, "Monsieur has probably missed his way?"

Victor took off his hat and bowed low. "Mademoiselle, I am ashamed to say that I have; and if you will have the kindness to tell me toward which point of the compass Montigny lies—"

"Very willing, monsieur. I myself am going to Marlotte, so that our way is the same. You have only to follow me."

And without wasting more words about it she struck into the thick of the forest again, disdaining the paths that diverged on her right and left, and moving with such deft rapidity that to follow her was a behest more easily heard than obeyed.

Our friend Victor however was not the man to walk in dull silence behind a pretty girl when, by dint of hopping, skipping and floundering he could maintain an intermittent position by her side. This girl was not only pretty but mysterious; for, although her dress was that of the people, her hair and accent seemed to belong to a somewhat higher station; and the attractions of beauty have never yet been lessened by a touch of mystery. Victor was determined to find out all about her; and for that matter she showed no disposition to balk his curiosity. Her chief desire was to get over the ground as quickly as possible, being, as she presently confessed, in fear of reaching home too late for supper; but she answered without shyness or reticence the various hints and questions addressed to her by her breathless companion, and once or twice put a question on her own score. She herself was not at all out of breath.

"Monsieur is an artist," she remarked. But this was rather an assertion than an interrogation; and indeed M. Berthon's garb, his short pointed beard, and his long locks betrayed him.

"Mademoiselle, I am a very humble member of the craft. I have often wished to be a great artist, but never more sincerely than I did a few minutes ago, when you were standing under the fir-trees yonder. It was a subject such as one does not come across every day. If I had the power to do justice to it, and if I could obtain your permission, I would paint you like that. It would be a short cut to immortality for us both." She laughed. "You would come too late for one of us, monsieur. I am immortal already."

Victor stared for a moment, and then struck his hands together. "Ah! now I have it! I was certain we had met before, though not in the flesh. You must be Némorosa."

"You have seen M. Royer's picture then?" "Of course I have seen it; who has not? You were right to say that you are immortal! Royer will never paint the equal of that picture. And so you are the original Némorosa!" repeated Victor under his breath, with a sort of admiring awe.

"At your service, monsieur. And when I say at your service, I mean at your service, you understand. I am at the service of all artists; and without flattering myself, I hardly know what some of them would have done without me. They would never have seen our forest, that is certain. Since you have heard of me already, you will be aware that the forest belongs to me, in a manner of speaking. There is not a wood-cutter from Chailly to Bourron, or from Archères to Boisle-Roe, who knows it as I do. When you want to see the real forest—the forest as it used to be before they disfigured it with little winding paths, and sign-posts telling people which are the *parties artistiques* and at what points they ought to exclaim "Sublime!"—you need only to go to the home of my aunt, Madame Vanne, at Marlotte—any one will show it to you—and ask for Marguerite. But perhaps," she added, checking herself, "you never heard of me by that name after all."

"Can you suppose me so ignorant?" cried Victor reproachfully.

But in truth the young lady's renown was less widely spread than she imagined, and had certainly not reached the ears of her present companion. Victor had indeed, as he had said, seen Royer's celebrated picture, entitled "Némorosa, *Reine des Bois*," and had understood that the nymph depicted therein was a tutelary deity of the forest of Fontainebleau, to whom some legend of the middle ages which he could not recall at the moment was attached. He had at once recognized in the fair Marguerite the original of that fabulous being; but up to the moment of that recognition he had neither

heard nor suspected the existence of such an original. This did not deter him from assuring Mlle Marguerite Vane that his meeting with her was the unhoped-for fulfilment of a long-cherished dream, nor from accepting with warmest thanks her gracious offer of guidance. He was about to suggest a day and hour for the carrying of the same into effect when his leader cut him short by pointing to a broad white track, dimly visible through the trees in the twilight. "There is the high road," she said; we part here. My way lies to the right, yours to the left. Good-night, monsieur." And with a wave of her hand she was gone.

The little village of Marlotte, situated on the outskirts of the forest, shares with Barbison the patronage of Parisian landscape painters. There every evening during the summer season a jovial assembly of bearded and oddly-costumed persons meet to enjoy a pipe and a glass after the labors of the day; and thither Victor Berthon, having disposed of his supper somewhat more hastily than was his wont, betook himself in the confident hope of obtaining a brotherly welcome, together with fuller particulars as to the past and present life of Mlle Vane. If he was disappointed in either of these expectations, it was rather in the former than in the latter. To desert a hard and ungrateful mistress after years of constancy is an offence for which excuses may be found; but every one knows how difficult a matter it is to forgive a friend for coming into a fortune; and as such the modest revenue which Victor was now known to be earning appeared to many of his old comrades. His reception therefore when he entered the long room where these gentlemen were seated in conclave, was just a shade less cordial than it would have been a twelvemonth before, and he had to listen to a few ironical congratulations upon his good luck and to some banter of a kind which might have tried the temper of a vain or touchy man. On the other hand, he heard all that there was to hear about Mlle Vane in a quarter of an hour. As chance would have it, the great M. Royer himself—a good-humored, gray-bearded veteran whom success had not wholly estranged from Bohemia—was sitting at the head of the table, presiding over the symposium; but even in his absence Victor would have had no trouble in gaining the required information. Everybody, it appeared, knew Némorosa; and indeed the inquirer was given to understand that she was of those whom not to know argues one's self unknown.

To arrive at an understanding of plain facts from the more or less irrelevant testimony of twenty voices demands some patience and attention; but as the result of it all Victor managed to gather that his wood-nymph was an orphan; that her relations belonged to the well-to-do peasant class; that her father had become a promising artist and had died young, leaving her a small independence; that she now lived with her aunt, la Mère Vane, who sold poultry and eggs at the Fontainebleau market; that she had all her life been allowed to come and go as she chose among the mazes of her beloved forest; and that she enjoyed an undisputed right to be regarded as the guardian angel of all artists who plied their trade therein—especially of such as lodged at Marlotte.

Thus much he had learned when the door opened and Mlle Vane herself walked in. Victor was surprised and a little disappointed. The place, the hour and the company were alike unsuitable, he thought, for the apparition of young women. This young woman however evidently held a different opinion. Without any appearance of embarrassment she nodded smilingly at the company, saying, "Bon soir, mes-sieurs," and receiving a general "Bon soir, Némorosa" in reply; and then, making her way to the end of the table, seated herself upon the arm of M. Royer's chair and began talking to him in an undertone. Presently she raised her voice, and pointing to Victor—

"I found monsieur wandering about the forest like a lost sheep, this evening," said she, "and he knew me almost immediately. You see, Père Royer, that one is famous beyond the limits of one's own village."

"Do not flatter yourself, my child. On the contrary, M. Berthon has just been asking us who you are."

"He has been asking who Marguerite Vane is, you mean; that is possible. But he knew Némorosa; and admitted that she was immortal. He admitted it a little reluctantly, even; for he had the kindness to say that he would have liked to immortalize me himself."

A unanimous shout of laughter, greeted this announcement. "Upon a milk-jug?" asked one satirist, "or upon a flower-pot? Can't you see the public of the year 3000 gazing reverently at a specimen of *barbotine* signed by the illustrious Berthon? Subject—meeting of Némorosa and the artist."

A fire of similar pleasantries fell from all sides upon poor Victor, who bore it philosophically enough. But Marguerite was pleased to take up the cudgels on his behalf.

"I always thought," said she, "that an artist might use any material that came to his hand. The old Italian masters worked upon the walls of houses; and did not Raphael paint one of his finest pictures upon the top of a cask?"

"Come, come! you are not going to compare a fresco to the blurred outlines of a bit of *barbotine*, I hope. I say nothing against *barbotine*: it is pretty, the colours are not bad and it has a good glaze; but that kind of thing is not art. No, no, my dear Némorosa; you may be thankful that your chance of going down to pos-

terity does not rest with the manufacture of Montigny ware. If such articles were to last forever what would become of trade? Pots and pans are made to be broken."

"And the varnish on the canvas cracks," said M. Royer, "and the colours fade; and so do youth and fame, and the roses on the cheeks of girls who sit up too late. Go to bed, my child—you ought to have been there an hour ago—and tell Madame Vane that if she can spare her donkey to carry my tent and easel a mile or two to-morrow afternoon, I shall be much indebted to her. Now be off!"

Marguerite shrugged her shoulders and pouted a little. "Any one who heard you would think I was a baby!" she cried. Nevertheless she slid off the arm of M. Royer's chair obediently, and, with a sweeping reverence to the company, vanished.

A few minutes later Victor Berthon followed her example. He was lighting his pipe on the doorstep, preparatory to making a start homeward, when one of the young fellows who had been sitting near him thought proper to slip out after him and catch him by the sleeve.

"Listen, my good Victor," said he. "I saw you looking at Némorosa in an odd way just now, when she was perched up beside old Royer there. Ah, *vieux farceur*! I know. You were asking yourself what all that meant, eh? Well; it meant nothing at all. Old Royer treats her as a child. He has known her since she was eight years old, and he forgets that she is now eighteen. The rest of us forget it too. I don't know whether she always forgets it herself or not; but that is not the question. There are a score of us here who consider her as our sister, and if it should enter into the head of any handsome young painter upon pottery to permit himself impertinences in that quarter—you understand?"

"The devil fly away with you fellows!" shouted Victor. "Who is thinking of being impertinent to your Némorosa? I don't care if I never see her again in my life. Do you think I am such a fool as to confound Mlle Vane with one of the young ladies whom one commonly meets in your society? You have sworn to make me lose my temper to-night among you."

"And it seems that we have succeeded at last," remarked the other drily. "My poor friend, you have fallen in love with Némorosa; there is no doubt about it."

M. Berthon deigned no reply to this absurd accusation, and strode away without as much as saying "Good-night." Perhaps it was an absurd accusation; perhaps he was not in love with this picturesque peasant-girl; perhaps her championship of ceramic artists had not sent a thrill of pleasure through him; perhaps he had not felt ridiculously jealous of M. Royer, who was old enough to be the girl's grandfather; and perhaps, as he had averred, he did not care if he never saw her again in his life. It all came to much the same thing in the long run; for before ten days were past Victor Berthon had gone so far as to say to himself that he would either marry Marguerite Vane or remain forever single. The very form of this asseveration was a sufficient testimony to the seriousness of his attachment; for though Victor was not without experience of the tender passion, he had never before contemplated even the distant eventuality of marriage. But the possession of a settled income is apt to subvert a man's whole views of life and its contingencies; and a few excursions into the heart of the forest under Némorosa's guidance, a few studies from nature, dashed off while she glanced over his shoulder, a chance meeting or two, and sundry brief interviews on Madame Vane's doorstep in the starlight had done the rest. The young artist's mind was made up; and, although he did not communicate his intentions to anybody, he had the entire little society of Marlotte for his confidant. M. Royer knew all about it and approved of it; as did also Madame Vane, a hard-headed, soft-hearted old person, who, after making certain preliminary inquiries at Montigny and elsewhere, became a warm supporter of the pleasant young fellow who had without much difficulty wormed himself into her good graces. As for the confraternity of artists, they had been in possession of this open secret from the outset, and, being good-natured fellows in the main, they did not chaff their comrade more than was fair and reasonable under the circumstances, while in the presence of Némorosa nothing could exceed their respectful unconsciousness of the destiny that appeared to be in store for her. Poor innocent! poor little angel!—they contemplated her from that essentially French standpoint which will have it that every woman must either be a saint or a very unequivocal kind of sinner, and they watched the unfolding blossom of her life with the tender, sentimental and half-regretful interest which such spectacles have the privilege of arousing. It was a pretty little idyl that they were looking on at—a pretty little leisurely idyl, played under the greenwood tree to the accompaniment of rustling leaves and cooing doves, and the echoing strokes of the woodman's axe, and the far-away sound of human voices and laughter in rocky dells and shady lins. Victor took things easily, not hurrying the progress of his courtship, and they were grateful to him for his forbearance. At the end of the fine season doubtless there would be a wedding, and Marguerite Vane would become Marguerite Berthon, and Némorosa would never be Némorosa again. It was a pity, but it was the way of the world, and Berthon seemed likely to prove as good a husband as another. Such was the view