

MAN'S FIDELITY.

As I said good-bye at the station
In the little country town,
And kissed away the tear drops
While her hair fell bewitchingly down,
And she looked at me so sweetly
And said: "You will not forget"—
I swore to her I'd be faithful,
And called her a dear little pet.

Then the train bore me back to the city
To busily toil each day;
There was scarcely time to remember
My girl so far away.
But when the day was ended,
And I sat in silence alone,
Then I thought of the little daisy
I should claim some day as my own.

Three nights I lay up bravely
As I thought of the time to come;
Three nights I tried to be cheerful,
But was only silent and gloom.
And then upon the fourth night
I gave my moustache a twist,
Put on my killing necktie
And called on another girl.

THE ARTIST'S STORY.

BY AGNES KERSON.

They had been engaged only a week, and she had not yet lost the feeling of unreality about it all. It was so strange, so wonderful, that he should have chosen her—chosen her from her brilliant sisters to crown her life with his love.

Was she dreaming still? Was it all a dream that must pass with the dawn, and leave the cold familiar light of real life around her once again? And seated cozily in the warm corner by the summer house, with her big hat shading her face from the sun, Jane thought it all over again.

He had gone to stay in the village some six weeks ago. They were all having tea on the lawn when he came in, and was introduced to the gay party—"Mr. Dean, the renowned artist, the man whose picture is the picture of the Academy this year."

Remarks about him buzzed round while he drank his tea and talked to Mr. Archer Wilmot, and looked with grave tender eyes at the merry girls round the table. And then—Janie remembered it all so well—he went to inspect the gardens with two of her elder sisters; and she joined the lawn tennis party again, and played very badly, for she could think of nothing but his sad dark face, and the strange lingering glance that she had caught from his eyes, when she ventured once to look at him.

He seemed to be always at the priory after that. He was an old friend of their father's, the girls heard, and they were told to give him the warmest welcome. None of them were loth to do that, for he proved to be one of the pleasantest of companions.

The girls teased Lottie, the eldest of the girls, about him, and begged to be allowed to stay with her in her beautiful home at Richmond. None of them had any idea of the truth of the case; Janie herself never thought it in the least possible that he could care for her, though she dearly loved him—not till that wonderful evening a week ago, when they had met accidentally in the green lane by the church.

Janie had been on her weekly visit to an old bedridden woman in the village, and was wandering slowly home, with her dog beside her, feeling disconsolate enough, poor child, and wishing that Mr. Dean would go away and leave them all at peace again. Then he stepped out quite suddenly from the lych-gate and smiling down at her he took her little trembling hand.

"I have been waiting for you," he said, "sitting on the wall here and wondering why you were so long."

Janie said something in reply—a few incoherent words—for his manner and glance startled her out of all her composure. He stood just beyond the shadow of the ancient gateway, holding her hand close in his.

"I was waiting to speak to you," he said after a moment's silence, in which Janie heard as in a dream the twitter of the swallows in the blue air. "I have your father's permission to ask you. Will you be my wife?"

That was a week ago. Just so long had Janie worn her pretty betrothal ring, the blue stone of which she looked at now with a tender smile; and once more she tried to think how he could have cared for her. She was the plainest of the sisters, merely a small fresh-cheeked little maiden with soft brown eyes—not a fit bride for an artist whose beautiful imaginings had won him such fame. It was no good endeavouring to understand it; she could only try to be more worthy of his choice, to be true and faithful to him, and, ah, so loving!

Thinking thus, his voice came to her, calling her. She sprang up, and with the shy blush that came so easily, went down the path.

"Little truant, I have been searching for you everywhere. My next step would have been to drag the pond. Where have you been?"

"By the summer house. I thought you were going with papa."

"I begged off. I knew you would be miserable without me; so I was self-denying, and came to look after you."

"Indeed I was very happy," Janie retorted.

"Oh, Janie! You don't know how dreary the afternoon seemed, how very long the hours were. Why, I believe you have been crying."

Janie raised her eyes for his inspection; but they dropped again instantly, as she drew a little nearer, taking hold of his gray sleeve with trembling little fingers.

"Arthur," she said hesitatingly, "I do wish you would tell me how you thought of me first. I have been thinking of it all this afternoon. It is so strange that you should care for such a foolish child as I am."

"How do you know I do, Miss Vanity? Come, sit down here; it is cool and shady and out of the way of those sisters of yours;" and he drew her down beside him upon the bench that stood under a great beech.

It was very quiet there, the path shaded by a double row of fine trees, with the lawn on the one side and the park on the other.

"Now try to be exact and logical for once, young lady, and tell me what grounds you have for believing for an instant that, to put it as you do, I do care for you."

"And don't laugh at me."

"Laugh at you! Bless the child! If you would only look at me instead of tearing your handkerchief into small bits!"—Janie desisted with a blush—"you would see that I am as grave as—Dick there!"—pointing to Janie's white dog, who was regarding them with steadfast eyes from the middle of the pathway. "Now I will proceed with my explanation. Many years ago I was sitting at Bagdad, and fell in with a musician." Janie looked up with wide-open eyes. "Queer people, those magicians. This one was a good fellow in his way, and he told me that, if I went to Thorndale on the 14th of July and visited my old friend, the Squire, I should meet a young lady in a green muslin dress who was the queen of all the fairies. Her I must wed, and then obtain possession of the fairy revenues and live happy ever after. You wore a green muslin dress, therefore, you are the queen of the fairies, and I am marrying you for your money."

Janie's merry laugh made Dick dash around them wildly, in the expectation of a race. But the little girl was not daunted in her inquiries. She tried a little coaxing.

"I want so much to know. You looked at me so on that first evening, and you weren't in love with me then."

"Dear Shepherd, now I find thy saw of might,
Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?"

"Do you intend to correct Shakespeare, mademoiselle?"

"Did I remind you of anybody you once knew?" persisted Janie.

Her question startled him at once into gravity.

"Have you heard? Has any one told you—"

"What was I to hear? Ah, then there is something! Won't you tell me! I could not bear to hear it from any one else."

"My darling, I meant to tell you; it is better you should know. And yet, my Janie, I love you so very dearly that I could wish the past away and you my first love."

"Oh, I knew I could not be that. It does not pain me a bit to think you cared for somebody else. I knew it was so. But please tell me."

"I will." He hesitated still, bending forward to smile into her earnest, pleading face.

"When you have heard my story, darling, you will know how dearly I love you, for I am glad to have lived through it all. You have not only made my future a bright one, sweetest, but it robs the past of its worst gloom to look at it by your side. It is a long story, Janie, and I will begin at the very beginning, so you may understand it all."

It seemed a difficult story to tell, for he sat for three or four minutes looking straight before him, his dark, handsome face very grave. There was a strange feeling in his mind that the past had come back again: time slipped back eighteen years, and he was again a penniless tutor. For once before, in the beautiful long ago, he had sat on that same bench one summer afternoon, with the same trees waving to and fro, above, and a girl with soft brown eyes—Janie's eyes—beside him; and they too had been all the world to each other.

To break the spell, he took the little hands lying loosely clasped on her holland dress, and looked tenderly into the childish, downcast face blushing rosy red under his eyes.

"It was your aunt I loved, Janie. Look," and he pointed to two initials carved on the oaken rail they leaned against. "'H. W.'—Helen Wilmot. Everybody called her Nellie. You have heard of your Aunt Nellie, darling?"

"She died long ago. Her grave is in the churchyard."

"Yes, long ago. It is a very long time since—eighteen years—and yet it seems but yesterday. You are very like her; she had just your eyes, so softly brown. It was your dear eyes that struck me on that first evening. You have her very look."

"And you loved each other?" asked Janie, gently.

"Yes, darling. Midsummer madness it was indeed, and we suffered bitterly enough. You don't remember your grandfather?"

"Oh, no."

"Of course not. Well, I won't speak evil of your ancestors; but he was a hard man. Your father and I had been friends at school; and, when I left college I came down here to coach up his younger brothers for the civil service examinations. I had always dabbled in paintings, and spent all my spare time in the woods studying trees. When there was some talk of the only girl coming home from school, Mr. Wilmot asked me if I would give her lessons in painting. Of course there was nothing for me but to consent—not that I much relished the

prospect, for you know what your uncles are like, Janie, and they were the same then—handsome, headstrong, brainless fellows, with as much idea of art as a thoroughbred greyhound; and I pictured their sister as the same kind of creature. Your father was away with his regiment, and the boys could tell me nothing about her. Their holidays had been at different times and they scarcely knew her. For the last six months she had been staying with an aunt in London, and now she was coming home for good. I am dwelling on this part of it because I want you to see how naturally everything came about. There was no woman in the house; your grandmother had been dead for years, and Nellie was the only girl. You can fancy how her coming was talked of and looked for and prepared for. At last she came. It was unexpectedly after all; they had caught an earlier train than they had expected, and we were playing cricket on the north side of the house when her father brought her to see her brothers. I saw her coming across the smooth expanse of green lawn all in the sunshine, a small figure—small indeed by your father's side—dressed in some gray stuff, with a bow of scarlet ribbon at her neck. Do you want to know what she was like, Janie? Look in the glass; for she was as like you as two blades of grass are alike—different, yet so very known apart. You are taller, I think, by the merest trifle, and she was the paler, but you are her sweet self. To find her again in you—ah, I am constantly afraid you will fall into nothingness and leave me more utterly alone than ever! Janie, it does not grieve you to hear all this? You look troubled, darling."

"Only for you, Arthur," she answered eagerly. "It is because I can guess something of what is coming. I wish—oh, I do wish it had been different, and that you had married her and been happy all these years!"

He put his arm round her with a fond look.

"She would have loved you dearly, Janie, but you are all to me that she was, my darling—and how much more will you be in the happy years to come, my own little wife!"

"Tell me the rest," was her whispered response.

"It seems strange to think of it now, but I remember I was disappointed in her at first. She was not in the least pretty, and her cheeks had not that wild-rose bloom. 'A pale, uninteresting school girl' was my verdict as I watched her playing chess with her father that evening. My first lesson came next morning, the first day of that wonderful summer. She knew nothing of art—could scarcely hold a pencil properly; but one could not be with her and not feel the better for her sweet presence. I had no sister; I had never known my mother; the women I had mixed with were commonplace feminine mortals. In Nellie I saw a realization of my ideal of perfect womanhood. Pure, tender, true as steel, she was too good to live."

His voice trembled and failed him for a moment, and Janie's soft hand stole into his.

"Since her death I have never mentioned her name to any one but you, my darling," he went on, after a moment. "But I want her to be a memory in both our lives, that you may fully share my thoughts."

"Thank you for telling me," was the low remark. "Please go on."

"There was a man living near—he had the House at Woodlands, where your Uncle Jasper lives now. He called constantly at the house after Nellie came home, and from what happened afterwards, I know your grandfather encouraged his visits and gave his consent to his engagement with Nellie if he could obtain her concurrence. But at the time I scarcely realized his existence; and it was just the same with Nellie. We were so happy together; she was constantly in the school-room with the boys, who adored her, and she would join us in our shorter walks. Moreover, there were my painting lessons, which threw us much together. I cannot understand even now how they were so blind. So the summer went on, till one morning, as I was sketching with her—Do you know the old bridge just beyond the park?"

"It was swept away in the flood about ten years ago, and papa built a new one."

"You shall see my picture of it when we go to London. It was a capital bit of work for a beginner, and I and Nellie used to sit down in the meadow by the river bank, just where the sweep of the three arches could be best seen. This was our last visit, for the picture was finished; and I remember she was looking at it, very proud of her work, when I told what we had both of us known for so many happy summer days. And that evening, when the lessons were over, I went to her father in the library and made my confession. Of course I knew he would be angry—I expected that; but he would not listen to me—he was like a madman. Do you know I cannot go into that end of the library now without seeing a vision of him standing up at the great table shaking his hands at me in blind rage. His daughter was promised to a man who could maintain her—he meant Mr. Scott of Woodlands—she was not for a penniless adventurer, and he ordered me from the house. I left it that night without seeing Nellie again; but I wrote to her from the village before I went up to London. I had an answer—a few hasty words begging me not to write again. There were marks of tears on the page—her gentle soul was not fit to bear such trouble. I went to London, half wild; without any fixed plan, and just as things looked darkest a great stroke of luck befell me. I was offered an appointment in Rome at a capital

salary, the only conditions being that I should be ready to begin my duties in a month and bind myself to remain in Rome for four years. I accepted the offer at once, and came down here to fetch my wife. I watched for her on Sunday afternoon, for she always went to church alone and came home across the Park. It was just here that I met her, poor, darling, looking so sad, her face robbed of its bright bloom. We had a long talk, till she grew frightened of being missed and hurried away—but not before she had promised to go with me to Italy."

The artist stopped here with a sigh, and then, looking at Janie, said, with a smile—

"You think she was wrong?"

"Oh, I—I don't know. Please tell me the rest."

"Ah, you do think it wrong, and so did Nellie; but when I put it all before her, she could not say me nay; and we settled that she should come to my cousin's house in London, be married from there, and then go straight to Italy. She took one of the servants into her confidence—it was necessary to do that—and on the day appointed she left the house just at dawn—left it, as she thought, for years. I was waiting for her in the park, and we walked across the moor to catch the first train at Rylands, and so reach London by eight o'clock. Fancy, darling, what a walk that was for her, leaving her house like a criminal, expecting every moment to hear the sound of her father's angry voice behind her. But we got safely to the station and started on our journey without seeing a face that we knew. Nellie's spirits rose, and she felt safer when my dear old cousin Anna—whom you must love, Janie—received her with eager welcome. We had some breakfast, or rather drank some coffee, for we could not touch any of the dainty eatables provided for us, and then Nellie changed her dress for something more fit for a wedding—something very quiet and simple—and we drove to the church. I have no clear idea of anything happening till we stood together at the chancel-rails and I took her hand in mine and felt that all our troubles were over. But it was too soon to feel secure, for just as the clergyman began the service, he was interrupted by hasty footsteps entering the church, and a loud voice raised to forbid the marriage. It was Nellie's father, and behind him was Mr. Scott, with a smile on his face which told me that I had to thank him for discovering our plans. They took her away from me, scarcely granting a moment to say good-bye. But that moment was enough for me to remind her that two years would give her power to act for herself. I claimed no promise of faithfulness, for I knew I could trust her. They took her away; I could do nothing."

"Oh, how cruel! How could you bear it?"

"I don't know. It was like being stunned by a heavy blow; for a time the sense of pain was crushed out by the shock. But the cruellest experience of all was that I could not hear a word of her. I wrote again and again; but your father was in India, and her other brothers were but boys, and there was no one to take my part. She was watched continually, some old hag in Mr. Scott's pay was with her always. Pity her, Janie, spending the long dreary days here where you have been so happy. She spent hours in the garden, I learned afterwards, tending her flowers, till she grew too weak to do anything but lie on the sofa by the window and look at the sky. I was in Italy making a home for her. It was so bright and tasteful; all the little things I knew she liked I gathered together, and was almost happy in the work. The two years passed, and I got the few weeks holiday I had bargained for, and started to bring her home. I could not sleep, I could not rest; a feverish anxiety had seized me; and I travelled day and night till Rylands was reached, and only a mile or two parted us. I could not ask after her—something checked my speech—and I started off to walk once more across the moor. You know the way, Janie—over the moor, down the long meadow by the bridge, and through the churchyard. It was a sunny evening, and as I crossed between the graves the sunlight shone on a white cross just off the path. You know it, Janie; it was quite new then, and the letters were freshly cut. I read them at a glance—Nellie's name! She had died a month before."

Janie could not bear to hear any more, her tears had long been running silently down her cheeks, and now her composure broke down altogether.

"Don't—don't cry so, Janie. Dear Nellie has been all these years in Heaven, and you have come to make it all up to me. But you can understand now why on that first evening your eyes had such a charm for me—the only eyes I cared to look into since she was lost to me. I loved you first for Nellie's sake; but I wooed and won you for your own, my darling!"

And at his eager words the painful feeling of jealousy of the dead that had been in Janie's heart as she listened to the story, died away forever.

UPON the suggestion of M. Cochery, the French Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, it has been arranged that four special representations of opera and ballet shall be given at the Grand Opera, at which the entire house, including the stage, will be illuminated by the electric light. M. Jules Coken has composed for the occasion a cantata commencing with the words "Terre, éclairé-toi!" The first two representations will be open only to those distinguished persons who are specially invited.