

BANKS'S FAIRY.

There'd bin a lot of trouble, an' we'd agree'd to part. After nearly ten years of it, we were goin' to dissolve partnership, 'er to go 'ome to 'er folks an' me to go any road I choosed.

Relations, as usual, 'ad caused a lot of it. I was no saint before I met 'Liza, but I'd tried 'ard to keep straight since, an', on the whole, I'd bin pretty successful. But they comes round rippin' up old sores, keeps tellin' 'Liza how fond o' a glass I'd bin, and after sayin' 'ow surprised they was as I was runnin' straight, proffysing as 'ow I was certain to die a drunkard, until she began to believe them, an' kicked up a shine every time I'd a blessed drop o' ale. My side was just as wicked.

Dolly was born about eighteen months after we was wed. She was a beauty, was dolly, just the right sort of a kiddie to bring 'appiness into any home, but after she came things drifted on from bad to worse. As it was 'owever, instead of the love some kids seem to create, she brought nothin' but jealousy. If she was crownin' to me an' kissin' an' lovin' me the missus would get mad with 'er, and it was the same with me when it came 'er turn. Each was afraid of the kid lovin' the other best.

She was about eight years old when matters reached a climax. 'Liza 'ad bin jawin' about somethin' I'd done once, an' I giv' it 'er back by askin' when 'er brother finished 'is Government job. It was then as she told me she'd take the kid an' go 'ome to 'er mother.

At last the time came when I could stand it no longer. It was pitiful to see the kid creep up to me, when she thought as 'ow 'er mother wasn't about, an' kiss me as though she was committin' some big crime, an' feared at bein' found out. Thus it was as I came to think she loved me only, never knowin' she used to do the same thing to 'er mother when I wasn't near.

I'd bin offered a job some miles away, an', after thinkin' things over, I'd accepted it. One night I crept into 'er room an', wrappin' the clothes round 'er, carried 'er away. Bill Thomas was waitin' with 'is cab, an' we drove to where I'd got lodgings, near the new job. She never woke on the journey, but lay smilin' in my arms until we arrived at what was to be 'er new 'ome. She opened 'er eyes then, an' looked round in a frightened manner, but, not seein' 'er mother, she nestled closer to me. I 'ugged 'er an' told 'er not to be feared, as she could love me always an' nobody would scold 'er. She looked round surprised an' pleased for a minute, an' then a scared look came into 'er face again an' she whispered: "Father, where's mother?" I told 'er we'd left 'er, an' that we two were goin' to live together where no one could stop us lovin' each other. But the tears came into 'er eyes, an' she sobbed out as she loved 'er mother, too.

Blow me! I could 'ave dropped. It 'ad all looked so bright for us, but she wouldn't 'ave. I promised 'er toys an' all sorts of things, but it was no use. She 'ad only one cry, an' that for—'er mother. What could a feller do? I stood it for a week, an' watched 'er growin' paler every day.

We went back as we came. She was asleep, an', layin' 'er cot, I went to face the missus. She glared at me a minute, an' I could see as she'd been cryin' a lot. Then, rushin' past me, she takes the kid up an' fairly smothered it with kisses. I let 'er go on, but it was 'ard work. It cut me to see the 'appy look come back into Dolly's face again. But just then she started tellin' the kid a lot of things she'd no right to. At this I jumps up, mad with rage, an', catchin' the missus by the throat, flung 'er across the room. Another minute, an' Heaven knows what would 'ave 'appened, but I heard a little shriek, an' Dolly came rushin' in between us, 'er face white as death an' 'er limbs tremblin' with fright. "Stop, father!" she cried. "You're not bad, mother isn't either, an'—an'—I love you both."

I stooped down an' kissed 'er, an' then, rushin' out, tumbled into a pud an' got blind an' incapable, the result bein' fourteen days. During that time I thought a lot, an' when I came out I'd resolved on a plan to make the kid 'appy, if I could.

That night, when I got 'own, I kissed 'er, as she lay asleep an' then turned to the wife. "Look 'ere, 'Liza," I said, "do you really love that kid?"

"Ask 'er," she replied, "an', at the same time, ask 'er who she loves best, me or you." "None o' that, now, 'Liza," said I; "I'm not goin' to trouble you for long. The broker will sell up everythin' to-morrow, an' you can go 'ome to your mother. Ten bob a week is the amount I'm goin' to pay you, an' I'll keep it to honest. As for the kid, she's too good for either you or me—an' that's straight. I know of a good school where she can be brought up like a lady if the money's

there, an' it shall be, or I'm a liar. You can take 'er until the arrangements are made, an' the money for the furniture will rig 'er out all right."

The next day we told Dolly about the big school, where she'd grow up to be a lady, an', after a good cry at the thoughts of leavin' us, she agreed to go.

In the afternoon the place was sold up, an' we stood together on the doorstep before goin'. I counted up the money I'd received an' gives 'er half of it for the kid's clothes, an' then divided the balance between us. She looked as 'ow I was doin' too much for 'er, but I reckoned 'alf of the old 'ome was 'ers, an' insisted on 'er 'avin' 'alf of what was left. Then I kissed the kid, an', not wantin' to appear too bitter towards 'Liza, I 'eld out my 'and an' said "Good-bye." She took it an' muttered the same thing, much softer than I'd 'eard 'er speak for years; then turnin' quickly away, left me standin' alone.

Suddenly a thought struck me, an' I called 'er back. "'Liza," I said, "you'll not say anythin' more to the kid about me bein' bad, will you?"

"Never no more Jim," she replied. "I swear it."

The next mornin' I went to the boss an' asked 'im if the job was still open. 'E be'aved like a toff, an' said it was, an' wanted to know where I'd bin. At this I told 'im everythin', an' asked 'is 'elp to get Dolly into the school an' 'e promised to do all 'e could for the kid.

It was dreary work after that. At nights I hung round the place 'Liza's people lived in the 'opes of seein' Dolly, but for a week I never managed it.

At last the time came when she was to go away.

We went down by the train to D—all together, an' tried to appear friendly to please the kid, but each blamed the other for the partin', so it weren't genuine. Dolly seemed very quiet, but didn't cry until we were leavin' 'er at the school. Then, after we 'ad kissed 'er, she put her little arms round both of us in turn an' sobbed "Goodbye." She stood watchin' us until we were out of sight, an' then 'Liza an' me separated.

Just before Christmas there came a letter from the lady as kept the school, sayin' as the children were givin' a performance at Christmas for some charity, an' Dolly bein' such a pretty little, interestin' girl—their's 'er words, blow me if they're not!—that she was to be the fairy. She also sent two tickets in case 'er father an' mother would like to come down an' see 'er.

I kept that letter back until Christmas 'ad nearly come, an' then I sent it on to 'Liza in the usual way, only this time I sent 'er an extra half quid, thinkin' as she couldn't 'ave much left out of 'er weekly money. Then I waited, an' wondered if she'd turn up.

She did. I saw 'er on the station, lookin' very neat an' trim, an' she, seein' me, came up an' thanked me for the extra half-quid, an' walked slowly away again. Some'ow it struck me she only wanted a call to bring 'er back again, but, feared of gettin' snubbed, I couldn't do it.

It was a long walk from the station, an', as the snow was comin' down thick an' fast, I found myself wonderin' 'ow 'Liza was gettin' on.

The 'all was packed an' the play just about to commence when she came in, covered with snow an' lookin' awfully jaded an' tired. Bein' early I 'ad a good seat near the front, but she was up against the door.

I can't tell you much about the play, for, to tell the truth, I couldn't see nothin' but Dolly. When she came on the stage I was staggered. She 'ad grown, an' looked more like the fairy she was playin' than flesh an' blood. She was prettier than ever, an', my! you should 'ave 'eard 'er talk—just like a real lady. The people cheered 'er everythin' she did or said, an' blow me if I could 'elp gettin' up an' shoutin' "Well done, Dolly," an' 'Liza, she did the same thing. Dolly 'eared us both, an' when she wasn't speakin' she looked round the 'all until she saw me, an' then smiled an' nodded 'er 'ead.

At the interval I went out, an' when I came back I found the missus 'ad disappeared. For a minute I was mad, thinkin' she 'ad gone to see Dolly before me, but just then a gentleman walked up an' touched me on the shoulder.

Said 'e, "Are you Mr. Banks?" to which I replied "I am." "Then," says he, "will you come this way, please? I am the stage-manager, an' Dolly 'as just told me you an' your wife was sittin' apart. Your tickets entitle you to a reserve seat, but in the crush I supposed you 'ave got separated."

I followed 'im, too surprised to speak, an' 'e placed me next to the missus, almost on the front row.

Presently the play started again an' Dolly came on the stage. She smiled an' nodded gaily towards us. I shuffled in my seat an' looked at the missus. She looked at me an'

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flushed hotly. An' some'ow we could both tell that Dolly was watchin' us.

"She's grown," I whispered, at last.

"She 'as," said 'Liza. "An', oh! Jim, ain't she pretty?"

"Makes you feel kind o' proud she's your kid."

"Our kid, you mean, Jim," she replied, addin', as a burst of applause was given for Dolly, "She's you to thank for this, starvin' yourself to make 'er a lady."

"Not so bad as that, lass," I said. "It's bin a bit 'ard at times, but I've never wanted for a bite."

"Nay, Jim," she replied. "Truth's truth, an'—an', no girl need want for a better father than you've bin to 'er."

"Do you mean it, lass?" I said, 'ardly believin' my own ears.

"Mean it? Of course I do," she answered, strugglin' with somethin' in 'er throat an' turnin' 'er face away from me. "We've both bin fools, Jim, an' I've bin the biggest. That kid's got enough love for both of us, an' 'eaps to spare."

"Wonder why she sent that toff?" I said, tryin' not to show 'ow pleased I felt at 'er words.

"Can't you tell?" she replied.

For a moment I 'esitated, an' then, says I, "'Liza, would you like to please the kid?"

"Give me 'alf a chance, Jim," she answered.

"Ain't I prayed time after time for a chance of doin' 'alf as much as you've done for 'er." She didn't turn 'er face away this time, an' I could see the tears rollin' down 'er cheeks.

I waited until I caught Dolly's eye, an' then, puttin' my 'and through the old gal's arm, I drew 'er up close to me. Dolly understood, an' waved 'er fairy wand over us, as though to drive away all troubles of old. Then, the play bein' finished, she disappeared, smilin' sweeter than ever I'd seen 'er before.

We waited a bit, an' then went behind the scenes an' saw 'er together. We didn't stay long, 'cause of catchin' the train back, but she's comin' home to see us before long. It'll be a new home, an' me an' the missus will be waitin' together to welcome our fairy.

Goin' back in the train we agreed to start 'fresh an' let bygones slide. Also I'm goin' to paint a big sign, an' the words on it'll be— "No relations wanted."

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