

This was inspired by Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Ilych."

## The Wedding of Janice

by Madeleine Dougherty

George entered the front hall, following the other guests. The fine dresses brushed against the men's suits creating a continuous shushing sound below the guests' conversations. The flowers' abundant scents choked out from the perfumes wafting from the women's wrists and necks till all he could smell were lilies and lilac. Robert called to him from the altar and waved him forward. The guests parted and seeing who they were parting for, began calling out compliments and congratulations. George smiled serenely as he took his place next to the priest. The violins began tuning as George watched dust particles glittering in the colorful rays streaming in through the stained glass windows. He now understood why she had been so adamant that the ceremony be at ten o'clock. The sun was in the perfect place to bring fire to the blues and greens. The whole church looked gilt and bejeweled. His smile became joyful as he thought of how beautiful his soon-to-be wife made the ceremony of their joining. He grew giddy, and his heart pumped faster as he looked down the aisle.

Janice had a life full of love. Her parents were sweet to her, focusing all their love and attention on her as the only child. At a young age her play became consumed with weddings and dates between her dolls. After her mother related the tale of her wedding to Janice's father, Janice's mind was delighted by the idea of the perfect man and the perfect wedding.

As a twelve year old, she organized weddings amongst her friends. She must have personally married every boy in town at least once. She had 14 husbands by her fifteenth birthday. Each ceremony took a lot of preparation. It had to be perfect. There was an old willow

tree that she and her bridesmaids would carefully decorate with strings of pansies, daisies, and apple blossoms. It was a wonderful summer when her mother became interested in crafts. They had access to fake pearls, ribbons, and feathers. Janice used the lace veil from her confirmation to signify who the bride of the day would be. She was very careful to keep the veil clean.

As she grew into her teens, Janice helped her friends to make good matches from among their male companions. Those same matches became real as they all married as adults. Janice did not. She, with the help of her family's wealth, chose to travel and see the world. In every country she went to she observed the wedding traditions. She took note of the hand fasting customs in the Celtic lands and the luck the bride's braids brought to her, and the presence of red in India and China and purple in Japan. Ceremonies could become days of celebration with food, dance, and song. The gifts could be extraordinary, like in Korea when they were sometimes upward of \$40,000. Rituals were done to look into the couple's future and ward off evil spirits. Every tradition was beautiful, meant to bring happiness, prosperity, and love.

This was also when she met George. He, too, was traveling. He had wealth, but chose to spend his time furthering his education rather than being stuck in a boardroom like his father before him. He was a scholar of the world. It was at a German wedding of their two friends that they met. They danced, talked, and kept the bride and groom from leaving by tying ribbons across the exits until the groom paid the toll.

When George asked, Janice did not hesitate to say yes to continuing her travels at his side. They visited Greece where diamonds are considered the gods' teardrops and ivy symbolizes endless love. They froze through a winter in Russia, and watched as the bride beat the groom in the race to the carpet where they said their vows signifying that the bride would be the head of

the household. In Belarus, George began keeping track of the many meanings of the color white when he learned that there it was the color of joy. Janice learned of the importance of the bridesmaids. They were meant to confuse evil spirits who would possess the bride by dressing similarly. With each wedding, Janice saw the strength of George's loyalty. She knew he must not appreciate being dragged to these weddings of people they barely knew. George saw Janice's excitement at learning the new traditions, and her passion and love for the world. He wanted to see that expression of joy on her face every day he had left. When they decided to return to Janice's home, George asked for her hand.

Her parents were so happy that Janice had found her love, and immediately gave their blessing. Two months later they were married in a big church that Janice had carefully decorated with purple and blue flowers and red and white ribbons. She wanted to create new traditions, so their hands were tied together with braided gold rope detailed with jewels. Their rings hung down from loops in the rope. All the couples she had helped into being were in attendance, clapping and congratulating as Janice finally said, "I do."