

ton?" she asks. "To the best of my knowledge, you saw me first in the hunting-field at eight o'clock in the morning."

"There are some things in heaven and on earth beyond your knowledge, are there not?" she asks, with a smile. "I saw you first yesterday evening, when you were on the river, with Will and Janet Lawrence. I was riding by, when I heard you singing, and I dismounted from my horse and went to the river-bank. As I parted the bushes, I saw your face, with the sunset radiance on it, and I thought—But it would probably not interest you to hear what I thought. Do you remember your song? I shall never forget it." Then, half under his breath, he sings:

"A thousand suns will stream on thee,  
A thousand moons will quiver,  
But not by thee my steps shall be  
Forever and forever."

"I remember very well; but it was a melancholy song to be your welcome home," says Kate, recollecting, with a sense of consternation, in what manner he was discussed on the occasion to which he alludes. "How strange that you should have been so near us and we did not know! Pray, have you an invisible cap?"

"No; but I began to think that there must be magic in the matter, when the face that had haunted my waking and sleeping dreams all night flashed upon me this morning, when you turned, as I was following you on your mad chase. Do you believe in fatality?—or do you only believe in coincidences? At any rate, it is strange that I, who expected to be in a very different place this evening, should be here now—with you."

"It is strange," she assents, "but I suppose the theory of coincidences will cover the facts, without calling upon fatality to explain them. You can go to Greenfield to-morrow morning and take the train without fear of molestation," she adds, giving him the full benefit of her eyes in a laughing gaze. "I will not stop you on the river or in the field. I promise that."

"I fear you have stopped me for once and for all," he says. "If I were wise, perhaps, I should go to Greenfield, but—" He pauses abruptly for an instant, then adds, in another tone, "Will you be sorry if I do not go?"

In accordance with the prudent resolution she has formed, Kate should either advise him to go, or else make clearly manifest her indifference to his going or staying. But she does neither. The rose-flush deepens on her cheeks, the dark fringes of her eyes droop. She answers lightly, but in a tone that tells more than words:

"Do you often angle for compliments! How can I possibly be sorry, after your kindness this morning?"

Ah! what are prudent resolutions worth, to one short hour of youth and happiness "in the gloamin'!"

#### CHAPTER IX.

"Her motion, feeling 'twas beloved,  
The pensive soul of tune expressed;  
And oh, what perfume, as she moved,  
Came from the flowers in her breast!  
How sweet a tongue the music had!  
'Beautiful girl,' it seemed to say,  
'Though all the world were vile and sad,  
Dance on; let innocence be gay.'"

"It has grown very late!" says Kate, suddenly glancing round with a start. "How quickly twilight deepens when—one is not observing! We must go back to the house; every one will be wondering what has become of us."

"I imagine every one knows what has become of us," Tarleton calmly replies, "and I am well aware that blessings are being poured upon my head for monopolizing you in such a fashion."

Still they do not trouble themselves to make haste. It is a matter of time to saunter back through the garden, to pause and gather a few flowers, to cross the lawn, and finally to approach the house, from every open door and window of which a flood of cheerful light streams. A group of gentlemen are on the piazza. Kate passes these, and in the hall meets Mrs. Norton.

"Why, my dear, have you just come in?" says that lady. "The girls are all up-stairs taking off their hats for the evening. Supper will be ready in a few minutes, and then there is to be a dance."

"Oh, how charming!" cries Kate, gayly. Her blood is bounding like wine in her veins, her eyes are shining like stars, her cheeks are like roses; she feels as if to dance is the thing of all others she most desires—the most delightful outlet for the excitement which tingles in every nerve. "Dear Mrs. Norton, I did not know how late it was," she says; "but I shall be ready as soon as the rest—see if I am not!"

She flies away as she speaks, and Mrs. Norton looks after her almost wonderingly. "What a pretty, pretty creature!" she thinks. "There is something about her that is fairly dazzling! How Carrie can consider Belle Palmer to compare to her, I do not understand."

Carrie herself is almost shaken in her loyalty to Miss Palmer's charms, when Kate's radiant face flashes upon her as she stands near the door of the large chamber which is full of the chatter of nearly a dozen girls.

"So here you are at last, runaway!" she says. "We have been wondering how long you meant to stay out in the garden. Here is a mirror, where you can take off your hat and arrange your hair."

"I must ask Janet to arrange my hair," says Kate. "Has she finished with her own?"

"Yes," answers Janet, advancing. "I finished some time ago, and have been waiting for you."

"I am sorry," says Kate; but it was so pleasant out in the dusk, and I did not think how time was going; though, to be sure, not thinking is never much of an excuse."

Janet gives a keen look at her face. "It is very evident why you did not think," she says. "Kate, I wonder if there is any use in telling you again to take care?"

"And I wonder if there is any use in telling you again that I am in no danger?" replies Kate. "Did you enjoy your game of croquet? I felt so stupid in not being able to join in it! But I can dance. Thank Fortune, there is nothing the matter with my feet!"

"Nor with your tongue," says Janet. "I see you have some lovely roses. I will put this splendid Marshal Niel in your hair."

While these important matters of the toilette are in progress, Tarleton is having a struggle with himself out in the purple dusk. He knows exactly on what ground he is standing, and he knows also that there are many reasons why he should not entangle this bright, beautiful girl in the meshes which are cast about his life—the meshes woven by his own hand.

"I am in no position to win any woman's heart," he thinks; "much less one whom Nature has so clearly intended for all that is most brilliant in life. How lovely she is—how lovely and how charming! There is a fatality in these things, for no other face ever struck me as hers did when I saw it first; and I know that, if I stay here a day longer, I shall be more in love with her than I have ever been with any woman in all my life. Knowing this, shall I not be mad if I stay? Ah, Kate, bonny Kate, if I had known you earlier! But now, the only wise thing that remains for me to do is to go. It will cost a wonderful wrench, but I can go now; after to-morrow it may be too late. Shall I—shall I?" He stands gazing at the silver sickle of the "hunter's moon" as it hangs in the tender sky. "Who could believe that it would be so hard to bid good-by to a girl whom twenty-four hours ago I had barely seen—to whom, twelve hours ago, I had never spoken!"

Who, indeed, can master the countless varieties, the protean forms, of this magnetic attraction which we call "love"? Men have learned the secrets of electricity, and made "the tidal flows confess their meaning;" but no seer has ever arisen to explain the subtler electricity that lurks in human hearts, the stranger tide of human feeling. We talk of "love at first sight" as if it were an anomaly; but is the love that arises by slow degrees a whit less mysterious? At least, there is no question that, when the influence which is to move it comes, the heart puts forth bud and blossom as readily in an hour as in a year.

Tarleton's resolution is still trembling in the balance, ready to be swayed in either direction by the slightest touch, when he is summoned to supper. "Oh, how pretty!" the girls say to one another, as they enter and see the festive table, with its flower-laden epergnes and piles of frosted cake. In the country, far removed from bakers and confectioners, such tables represent no ordinary degree of taste and skill in house-keeping, together with a great deal of labour, and are appreciated accordingly.

There can be no doubt of the gayety of the company which gathers around this table. The wit would probably not bear repetition; the laughter often breaks forth with little cause; but youth, high spirits, and perfect ease with one another, give a zest to the poorest jest. Tarleton yields to the contagion and is as merry as the rest, though he is seated by Miss Palmer; and Kate's graceful head, with a golden rose shining amid its dark braids, is divided from him by half the length of the table. It is likely that his eyes wander in the direction of that head a little too often; at least Miss Palmer suddenly surprises him, by saying, in a slightly condescending tone:

"How well Miss Kate Lawrence lights up! That is the great advantage brunettes have over blondes. We cannot bear a comparison with them at night."

"I don't think you need disquiet yourself on that score," replies Tarleton, glancing at the milk-and-roses of her skin. "There are some complexions to which any light must of necessity be favourable—Lawrence, what are you about?"

The last remark is addressed to Will, who is tapping on the table to command attention.

"I have been requested to address the company on a matter of importance," he replies; "and if I can obtain a minute's silence, I have a proposal to make, which it is to be hoped will meet with approval. There being no doubt of the enjoyment of the present gathering, it has occurred to two young ladies present—he indicates Miss Norton and his eldest sister—"that you will not object to be called together again on a like occasion."

"Hear! hear!" comes from several voices.

"In order to accomplish this object," proceeds the speaker, "and at the same time to show the beauties of our neighbourhood to the fair visitor who is honouring us with her presence"—here he bows to Miss Palmer—"I am commissioned to propose an excursion to Rocky Mountain to-morrow afternoon. All who are in favour of the plan, hold up their hands."

Hands of various sizes and shapes instantly appear around the board, and a chorus of voices express immediate and unqualified approbation. "Just the thing!" every one is exclaiming, except Miss Palmer, who turns to Tarleton, and says:

"Why do you not hold up your hand? Do you not like the plan?"

"I should like it very well," he answers, "if I could hope to share in it; but I fear I must leave the country to-morrow morning."

"Leave the country!" repeats Will, who overhears this. "Nonsense, Tarleton! we can't allow such a thing. Now that you are here, we mean to keep you—for a while, at least."

"He needs must, whom the devil drives," my dear fellow," replies Tarleton, lightly. "Be sure it is not inclination which takes me away, if I go."

Almost involuntarily he adds the last words, for he has glanced in the direction of Kate and seen the swift look of disappointment which falls over her face, as the shadow of a cloud falls over a sunny landscape. Also, he has caught the expression of relief which lights up Mr. Proctor's visage; and to pain the former and gratify the latter, by an act so repugnant to his own desire, is more than he can decide to do.

"Oh, if you are not certain of going, we shall count upon you," says Will, in reply to his last words. "The man who hesitates is gained. The matter is settled, then, my friends. Rocky Mount, to-morrow afternoon is the programme."

Nothing more is said of Tarleton's resolution of departure; and so it still hangs in the balance, when, supper being over, he finds himself on the piazza, with a cigar between his fingers. Looking through the open windows, the brightly-lighted parlours present an attractive appearance. The furniture having been moved aside, the dark, polished floors are left clear for dancing, and two or three pairs of girls are waltzing with each other to the music which a negro fiddler makes. "Partners for a quadrille!" somebody presently calls out; but, instead of seeking a partner for a quadrille, Tarleton strikes a match, lights his cigar, and sinks into a chair which stands conveniently near. Here he is still lying back at ease, watching alternately the star-studded sky and the shifting forms and colours of the scene within, when Mr. Norton walks upon him, pipe in hand.

"Bless me!" he says, perceiving just before he sits down, that somebody else occupies the seat, "who is this!—Tarleton? Why, I thought all of you young fellows were dancing!"

Tarleton extends his cigar. "I thought it better to forego one quadrille, than to give up this," he says. "But I beg pardon—have I taken your chair?"

"Not at all; there are plenty more here," replies Mr. Norton, finding one, and establishing himself in a comfortable position to watch the dancers. "There's nothing I like better than to see young people enjoy themselves," he says, complacently; "and, luckily, my wife agrees with me. She never minds any trouble, if it is to give pleasure to the girls and their friends. Now, I call this a pretty picture."

Tarleton feels averse of talking, but he murmurs something which may be taken for assent. "And the prettiest girl there, in my opinion," proceeds Mr. Norton, "is not that Miss Palmer, whom Carrie admires so much, but Kate Lawrence."

Tarleton's languor vanishes. "I don't think there is a doubt of that," he says, clearly and decidedly.

"She's very like her father—poor Allan Lawrence!" says Mr. Norton, letting out a long whiff of smoke. "She has all his wild spirits and taking ways; but it is to be hoped that she'll make something better of her life than he made of his. I never knew brighter promises come to a sadder end, than in his case. We are all fond of Kate—very fond—and therefore I am glad she is likely to marry such a good, steady fellow as George Proctor."

Tarleton's start is imperceptible to his companion; but he feels a chill to the tips of his fingers. At that moment his eyes chance to be following Kate's black and amber draperies as they cross the floor by Proctor's side; and the idea thus suggested rouses in him a sensation of absolute fierceness. When he speaks, however, his voice has nothing in it to excite the suspicion of the man by his side—the man who is congratulating himself upon giving this dangerous young gentleman a quiet hint that Kate is to be let alone.

"Is there a prospect of the kind?" he asks, carelessly. "It almost seems a pity, does it not? Mr. Proctor, by-the-by, who is he, exactly?—strikes me as being very commonplace, and rather more than a trifle heavy."

"It's better to be too heavy than too light," replies Mr. Norton. "Proctor will never set the world on fire with his brightness; but he does not lack good sense. He lives in Rocky County, where he has a fine plantation, about thirty miles from here. He inherited a good estate, and he's increasing it every year, I'm told. When you add steady habits to such a character as that, I don't see how any girl could look for more. Every now and then we hear of his being at Fairfields; and I hope, by this time, Kate is engaged to him. It is a chance that is not likely to come twice to a girl without a sixpence."

"I suppose not," says Tarleton, to whom every word is like a flake of fire. "A good estate—increasing it year by year—steady habits! These things ring in his ears like a sentence of doom. Surely, if he is wise—surely, if he thinks of the happiness of the girl before him—he will take himself out of her path, and let this

desirable suitor, this man who, in circumstances and character, is his own exact opposite, win her if he can! He says this to himself for one moment; then the strength of passion which he has never curbed, the reckless impulses on which he has never laid a rein, rise up and overcome the voice of conscience, as they have overcome it often before. He looks at the graceful, high-bred figure, the delicate, vivid face, and determines in his heart that the commonplace man by her side shall never win and wear such a jewel.

The quadrille ends soon after this, and, entering the room, he walks up to Kate.

"Will you give me a waltz?" he says; adding, as she hesitates, "I have a tolerable step."

"I was not thinking of your step," she answers; "but I have never waltzed with any one but the boys, and I don't know—I hardly think—"

"But I am one of the boys," he says, growing more eager as she hesitates. "Don't you know that? Ask Miss Sophy if I was not brought up with her, like Will."

"But you were not brought up with me," Kate retorts, laughing.

"No; but that was altogether an accident. I might have been, you know. As it is, we simply have a long arrear of acquaintanceship to make up. Ah, that old fellow absolutely knows a Strauss waltz! Come, you surely can't resist that."

"Perhaps it is the imploring eyes and voice which Kate cannot resist, rather than the 'Beautiful Blue Danube,' but she yields, and they whirl away.

What a pleasant dance it is! The floor is excellent, the music good, and both discover that their steps suit wonderfully. With Tarleton dancing is an accomplishment, and one which he has mastered thoroughly; but with Kate it is pure inspiration. She possesses that rarest of personal gifts—natural grace—to an uncommon degree; and this, united to a gay, pleasure-loving nature, makes the exercise a delight to her. It does not appear possible to either that they can ever tire; and when the cessation of the music brings them to a pause, both feel that it is a necessity to be regretted.

"Why, you are a perfect sylph!" says Tarleton. "You make me think of those old lines:

"But oh, she dances such a way!  
No sun upon an Easter-day  
Is half so fine a sight."

"It is in my feet," says Kate. "I have never had a dancing-lesson in my life. Oh, yes, I had, when I was a very small child, ages ago."

"A great many ages, I am sure! It is difficult to imagine that a person so venerable as yourself was ever a small child. But I am glad that you can dance. I feared that, as a consequence of your fall, you might not be able to dance any more than to play croquet."

"I do not feel any consequences of the fall, except in my shoulder," she answers. "I hope Diana is as well recovered, for I shall want to ride her to Rocky Mount to-morrow."

"Diana? Is that the animal that fell lame, in consequence of which you mounted Mr. Proctor's horse? Let me offer a substitute that will not prove so unruly as the latter. I have, at Southdale, a pretty, thoroughbred mare, which will be just the mount for you. May I bring her over to-morrow?"

"Bring her over to-morrow?" The gray eyes look wonderfully into his face. "But I thought you said, at supper—"

"I said nothing definite at supper," he interrupts. "I simply did not choose to commit myself. If you will let me be your escort to-morrow, and bring Flor—the animal of which I spoke—over for you, I shall certainly stay."

"That will be delightful!" As she speaks, the unconscious pleasure which shines in her eyes thrills him to the heart. "But I am afraid you change your mind very often, Mr. Tarleton."

"I shall not change it again," he answers.

So the scale is struck, and the trembling balance falls heavily on the side of a resolve which is to alter the whole aspect of Kate Lawrence's life.

(To be continued.)

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