

## CHAPTER XXV.

"What can I do to drive away  
Remembrance from my eyes?"

It has already been said of Kate that she is neither weak nor cowardly, and it is certain that she will bear herself bravely in the fierce struggle which lies before her—but under the first storm of grief which comes upon the untired human heart, the bravest soldier may lower his crest and forget his arms for a time. To a nature like hers—ardent, passionate, yet most tender, with the capability of faithfulness dominating all other instincts—such a blow as this falls with a force which colder souls are little able to comprehend. The time for self-control will come, and when it comes she will rise to meet it; but now—in the first sharp onset of pain—she lies prone as one beneath a whirlwind, her whole frame shaking with the convulsive weeping which she must stifle for fear it should be overheard.

She is in the refuge of her chamber, and through the open window where she kneels, the stars are shining with serene brightness in that far sky which seems at times a very vault of brass above our heads, when our hearts cry out, in the throes of some great longing or greater regret, for that which has been denied or withdrawn. Some one has said, very truly, "To the old, sorrow is sorrow; to the young, sorrow is despair"—and there is no sadder hour in life, full though it be of sadness to the brim, than that in which a young soul goes forth to meet and wrestle with its first great anguish. Whether it be that death has come, and

"The tongue which like a stream could run  
Smooth music from the roughest stone,  
And every morning with 'Good-day,'  
Make each day good, is hushed away."

or whether it is the sadder death in life, which we see around us every hour, of hearts failing, love growing cold, hopes dying, the battle is alike stern and terrible. With impotent passion we dash our hearts against the iron wall of some relentless fate, and they fall back crushed and bleeding, feeling as if life were too cruel to be borne, yet knowing—poor hearts!—that they must bear it to the appointed end.

So it is now with Kate. In her grief is little bitterness, for already the generous spirit has risen above that selfishness which makes resentment possible; and if she has a thought apart from the great sense of desolation which lies upon her, it is of sorrow for her parting words to Tarleton.

"Oh, my love," she sobs to herself, "why did I not speak more gently? One bids a kind farewell even to an enemy when it is to be forever—and to one whom, in spite of all, I love, why did I not say good-by as one might say it to the dying? Will my heart break? I do not know—it seems as if it must, but I suppose hearts can bear a great deal of agony. O my God, did I forget Thee too utterly in my happiness that Thou hast taken it from me like this? Taken it from me? What do I say! It was never mine except in dream, in fancy—it is all a great, a terrible, a bitter mistake, and, O my God, teach me how to bear it, for I know so little of pain!"

At last there comes the lull of spent exhaustion, for the tyrannous spirit must sometimes yield to the weary flesh, and so it is that Kate is sleeping when Sophy and Janet enter the room.

The latter goes to the side of the bed and looks at her—at the tear-stained cheeks, at the eyes already ringed by dark circles, at the pale lips, on which, even in sleep, the subtle shadow of sadness lies—then she says, in a tone of gentleness and pity:

"Poor Kate! She has a heavy weight already on her heart. We will not tell her this."

"This" is news of a very serious kind. The gentlemen who returned from Arlingford spoke at first in very vague terms of the threatened difficulty about the race. Tarleton, they said, having learned beyond doubt that Pierce had administered a dose to the horse in order to make him lose the race, had inflicted summary and severe punishment upon him; but, beyond that, nothing definite was known.

The cause of this reticence appears, however, when Miss Vaughn has retired. Then the fact is told that Tarleton has accused Mr. Vaughn of bribing Pierce to drug the horse.

"What reason has he for believing such a thing?" two or three startled voices ask.

"No very good reason, so far as I can learn," Wilmer answers; "but Tarleton is always impetuous and rash. I have not seen him, and there are so many rumors afloat that I don't know what is exactly true. Some say the groom accused Vaughn, others that Tarleton only acted on his own suspicion. However that may be, he went to Vaughn—whom he found in a crowd of men—and charged him directly with the outrage. It was easy to know what would follow. If Vaughn lacks principle, he don't lack courage. Friends interfered to prevent an immediate personal encounter; but it is an understood thing that a deal will be arranged."

"A duel!" The women look at each other with panic-stricken faces. "Oh, how terrible for Miss Vaughn!" says Sophy.

"Oh, how sorry I am for Frank Tarleton!" says Janet.

"Sorry for Frank Tarleton!" repeats Mrs. Lawrence. "It seems to me that he is the last person to be sorry for. 'Do you'—turning to her husband—"believe that Mr. Vaughn was guilty of such a thing?"

"I cannot tell what to believe," Mr. Lawrence answers. "I do not know what grounds Tar-

leton has for the accusation, and, until I know, I cannot tell who is right or who is wrong."

"It does not matter to me who is right or who is wrong," says Mrs. Lawrence, impatiently, "so long as Randal and Will are not concerned in it—but where are they?—why did you not bring them home with you?"

"Simply because they would not come," answers her husband, quietly, "and, as you are aware, I always treat my sons like gentlemen, not like school-boys. Randal declined to come on very good grounds. 'I brought Vaughn down here,' he said; 'he is my friend and guest, and I must stand by him. I should be a pitiful fellow if I failed to do so.' Of course, I could not gainsay this. If he believes that his friend is unjustly accused, he is right to stand by him—and he does believe it thoroughly."

"I don't think anything of Randal's belief," remarks Janet. "He is in love with Miss Vaughn, and jealous of Frank Tarleton."

"If there is to be a duel, will he act as Mr. Vaughn's second?" asks Sophy.

"I suppose so," answers her father, with a reluctant, pained expression. "Nothing of the kind was mentioned between us, but, taking it for granted, I found Will and told him that he must not, under any circumstances, be drawn into acting for Tarleton. 'It is not only that Mr. Vaughn is a guest under my roof,' I said, 'but it is enough to have one son mixed up in such an affair.' I am glad to say that Will promised to take no part in it—but he espouses Tarleton's side warmly."

"I wish Frank Tarleton and his horse were at the bottom of the sea!" says Mrs. Lawrence. "This is a fine state of affairs! A threatened duel, with one son on one side, and one on the other! I have a great mind to order the carriage and go to Arlingford after them myself."

"If anybody is killed, says Janet, passionately, 'I know that it will be Frank Tarleton. It is always the one who would be most regretted, who is killed.'"

"Has anything been arranged—I mean about time and place?" asks Sophy.

"Nothing that could be learned," Wilmer answers. "Any number of rumors were afloat, but nothing definite seemed known. They will keep it as quiet as possible."

After this it is no wonder that Sophy and Janet steal up-stairs like guilty conspirators, and their voices sink as they pass Miss Vaughn's chamber, and enter the room where Kate is sleeping. They whisper to each other as they undress, but avoid any direct mention of that which fills the minds of both. There is something terrible in thinking of the two men over whose heads the dark cloud of possible bloodshed hangs—and not less terrible in the thought of how the sister of one of them has lain down in calm unconsciousness to sleep, while Janet at least knows that the skein of intertwining interest has yet another thread. "O my poor Kate!" she says to herself. And Kate stirs and moans in her sleep, dreaming that she is again in Tarleton's embrace, and hears his voice say, "Whatever the future brings, remember that I love you."

The next morning it is generally understood that none of the ladies are going to the races. Despite the effort which is made (chiefly on account of Miss Vaughn) for cheerfulness, not even a stranger could doubt that some cloud is upon the household. Kate is, of all perhaps, the least conscious of this. For once, her attention is centred on herself—on her own sorely aching heart and sorrowful spirit—that she has little attention to bestow on the words and looks of others, while no one except Janet notices her closely—and Janet is wise enough and kind enough to utter not a word.

After breakfast the gentlemen go to Arlingford, and the feminine part of the household spend the day in that state of inaction and suspense which women have to endure so often in the course of life. Whether or not Miss Vaughn shares in the general uneasiness no one can tell. She is exceedingly listless, and declines to exert herself in any way whatever; but this has been her normal condition for several days, and cannot, therefore, be taken as an indication of anxiety. She speaks once or twice of her intended departure with her brother on the next day—but does not mention him otherwise.

To Kate the day is like a terrible nightmare. She cannot remember afterward how it is spent, further than that she has a dim picture of a pale girl—who startles herself when she glances in the mirror, with eyes that have wept themselves dry of tears—looking out over the brilliant autumn woods, to the far heavenly hills in their robes of tender haze, and saying to her heart:

"Courage! courage! This is too sharp and bitter to last. I shall conquer or I shall die—and in either case I shall find peace."

Ah, it is only the new recruit who dreams such dreams as this. The veteran soldier knows that neither death nor victory come to end some combats, which go on for many days and months and years. It is true enough that anguish can be "wearied down" at last, that temptation can be trampled under foot, and weakness conquered—but at what a cost! Could we know, when the conflict begins, how it will drain our heart's blood, and leave us spent and worn, even if victors, the number of those who fall by the wayside in despair would be a hundredfold increased.

By late afternoon Kate feels that endurance has reached its utmost limit. She has borne the companionship of others unflinchingly during the long day, she has talked with them of indifferent things when her own voice sounded

strange and remote in her ears, she has even smiled when Miss Brooke spoke of the pleasures in store for her, but now—now for a brief space—she must have solitude, freedom to look as she will, to weep if she will, or else (she thinks) go mad.

Fortunately, escape is easy. The sun is sinking in a bed of glory behind the western hills, when she leaves the house unobserved, and wanders down to the foot of the lawn, where a little stream runs, on the banks of which, a month ago, she found a four-leaved clover.

When we are suffering the first keen bitterness of grief or desolation, the most trivial thing has power to stab us like a sword. A month ago! Can it be only a month, Kate asks herself, since she lay here in the warm gold of the September sunshine, and joyously exulted in finding the mystical plant that was to prove an omen of good fortune? Alas, poor omen!—alas, poor fortune!—alas, most of all, for the light heart which was then without a care! How was it possible for so short a time to make so great a change? She looks round pitifully. So little, so very little, alteration in anything save herself! The pretty stream is hastening over its stones "in little sharps and trebles," the trees are drooping with foliage scarcely changed in tint, over the turf a few dead leaves are scattered, and they alone tell of the days that have passed since that afternoon when she heard Tarleton's name, if not for the first time, at least for the first time to give it any heed. People talk of instincts, yet if there be one thing more than another remarkable about us, it is our absolute want of instinct. The name which is to be a chord of music or a note of discord in our lives is spoken in our ears, and they give us no warning of all it is to mean; the face that will shine upon us as God's blessed sunshine, or darken our pathway like His curse, looks at us, and we do not rise to welcome or repel. Instinct! Why, the very brutes excel us, since they at least know friend from foe, while we, with all our boasted human knowledge, are often of the many who

"Do forge a life-long trouble for themselves  
By taking true for false and false for true."

Such thoughts as these occur to Kate, as her memory flies back over the rosary of golden days so brightly sped and so utterly gone. "If I could have known on that afternoon!" she thinks. "Why did I not know? Is the soul so obtuse, or is the flesh so dull, that we go to meet our fate in such utter ignorance? If I had known, ah, if I had known! Well, and if I had, what then? Would I put him, and the memory of him, out of my life, if I could? I do not know! I only know that this misery is more than I can endure—and yet that there is no help for it."

Burning tears rise to her eyes again and mist all the scene. But she does not yield to the rush of feeling which almost overpowers her. "I am a thousand times weaker and more contemptible than I ever thought I could be," she thinks, with set teeth and heaving chest, "to weep and weep for a man who does not care for me! Is there to be no end of this folly? I thought I shed every tear I had last night, but the supply seems inexhaustible. I will not cry, however—I will not! I will go down to the river and take a last solitary row, and say good-bye to everything."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

O love, my love! If I no more should see  
Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,  
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring,  
How then should sound upon Life's darkening slope  
The ground-whirl of the perished leaves of Hope,  
The wind of Death's imperishable wing?"

The resolution which Kate proceeds to execute is by no means an uncommon one with her. Will taught her long ago how to row, and, probably because she is his pupil, he does not hesitate to declare that she knows as well how to manage a boat as to manage a horse. By the time she has reached the river-bank, entered the boat, and pushed out from the shore, the sun has been gone some time, but, as on the evening of which her thoughts are full, there are luminous clouds which, having caught his splendor, fling it over the peaceful land and tranquil, yet ever-moving, stream.

As she floats down the current, with her eyes fixed on the glory which looks as if heaven itself were opening above the far blue mountains, a sense of something like calm comes to her. She has a temperament keenly alive to outside impressions, and the ineffable repose of which Nature is full at this twilight hour quiets her passionate trouble, for a time at least. The pastoral softness of the fair valley, the glowing beauty of the silent woods, the sweeping river with radiant tints falling on its breast, above all the steadfast, inviolate hills, and the great bending sky, speak to her of courage and patience and trust in God. After all, does it matter so much that her heart has been crushed, her happiness trampled, like a flower on which a rude foot has been set? Even in dying, a flower gives forth perfume, and shall hearts do less? The tender lips cease to tremble, and set themselves together in a serenity which, if sad, is also strong; and the lovely eyes, out of which all joyousness has vanished, gather in their depths a light as pure and sweet as that of the star which now begins to gleam above the glowing west.

"How one fails when trouble comes!" she says to herself. "How selfish one grows! how one forgets to think of others! Why should I cry out so bitterly against this which has fallen

on me? If I have been wronged, is not better to be wronged than to wrong? Is it not better to suffer than to cause suffering? God help me to realize through this pain what a terrible thing it is to cause pain, and never, never to inflict it willfully on any human being. God help me to keep a brave spirit, and to remember that there is plenty to do in the world, even if my heart is aching. What does the pain of a foolish girl's heart matter? Why, if I died here and now, I am too insignificant for it to make any serious difference to anybody, and, therefore, why should I fancy that it is important whether the better part of me is dead or alive? It is not important. The only thing which is important is to do what is right, and, then, whether happiness or unhappiness comes, will not greatly matter, for all is in God's hand."

So the sweet spirit rights itself, so the lull in the tempest comes, and, in the midst of sore pain, the dauntless heart rises, full of gentleness and faith, to make a brave fight for the peace which has escaped it.

So full of charm is the twilight scene, and so absorbing are Kate's thoughts, that she does not observe how far she has gone until a familiar landmark on the side of the stream warns her that she has to pull back more than a mile against the current. She turns the boat around, and as she does so the sound of a shot rings out sharply on the beautiful evening stillness.

There is nothing very remarkable in this, but because her quick ear tells her that it was a pistol-shot and not some returning sportsman emptying his gun, she pauses, and, resting on her oars, turns her head to listen. As she does so, she hears the frightened rush of a horse's feet along the road, which just borders the river. The sound gives her a sense of apprehension, and she thinks, "Can harm have happened to any one?" Involuntarily she looks at a point where the road rises on higher ground, and so becomes visible from the river. It is dusk by this time, and the point is distant; but Will has often said that Kate's eyes are as far-sighted and as keen-sighted as an eagle's. Even through the gathering shades of dusk, she sees that the horse which presently flies along is riderless—and even despite the distance, she recognizes it and cries aloud, "Mignon!"

She never forgets the awful thrill of that moment. For an instant longer she sits motionless, gazing ill at the spot from which the horse has disappeared, when, borne through the stillness, across the water, comes another sound—the prolonged, distressful howl of a dog.

That is enough to determine any doubt she may have as to the thing to do. With one swift movement, she turns the boat and rows rapidly toward the shore, gaining which, she springs out, makes the boat fast with trembling, eager hands, then breaks through the dense growth of alder and willow, and steps into the road.

Her ear has guided her rightly. Not ten paces from her lies the prostrate figure of a man, by the side of whom crouches the dog whose plaintive howls have drawn to his master's side, in that master's sore extremity, the heart which would dare all things to serve him. Twilight has rendered every object indistinct, but if it were midnight, Kate would know the man who lies before her. She does not utter a sound as she kneels beside him and lifts his head, but her face is pale as marble and well nigh as rigid as his own. Is he dead? She cannot tell, but it is certain that he is unconscious, and it is also certain that he has been wounded and is bleeding profusely. The red tide which flows almost directly from his heart covers her hands as she touches him, and brings from her pale lips the first cry which she has uttered.

It needs no experience to tell her that if this is not stopped, death must ensue very soon. But what can she do? To leave him lying here while she goes for help, is utterly impossible. Apart from the fact that she could hardly tear herself from the place of which she might say, as Thekla of Max's grave,

"That single spot is the whole earth to me,"

to go even for five minutes would be to leave him at the mercy of his enemy, whoever that enemy may be. "I could not do much to defend you, my poor love," she thinks; "but I could die with you, and I would—I would!"

But time is passing, and something must be done—so she tells herself in agony—and what is it to be? She looks at the dog, and the memory of the note he brought her on that night, which seems a century ago, suggests the thought of sending him for assistance. But Fairfields is the nearest house, and Fairfields is more than a mile away—can she wait? Can he wait, who lies as if already dead before her? With every nerve strained to the utmost tension, she listens—praying for the sound of a footstep, for the tread of a horse's hoof. If some one would come!—oh, if some one would only come! But there is no sound save the sighing of the breeze through the forest trees, and the rushing of the river.

After a few minutes—which seem like lagging hours—the suspense becomes intolerable, the delay more than she can endure. There is another road not far off, along which some one may be passing, while she kneels here as if stricken dumb, and Tarleton's life-blood ebbs away. The thought makes her rise to her feet, and the next moment her clear voice is ringing out on the falling night with a cry for help. Again, and yet again, she sends it forth—Rex joining with his plaintive howl. As she pauses a moment to gather renewed breath and strength, there comes—yes, there certainly comes an answer! From the other road a man's voice re-