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KATE ASHWOOD.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Charles had, as we know, undertaken Mr. Leicester's agency, and he was resolved to act by his benefactor in the best manner he could. Mr. Power's consent once gained, there were many reasons for urging on the marriage with all possible haste. Mr. Power might recall his very reluctant permission. Mrs. Power might interpose some insuperable obstacle. Some one might fall ill, or a distant relative die; and on the principle that delays are dangerous, they determined to use all possible haste. Mr. Power gave his daughter £2,000, adding, that if she had married some more eligible person, he would have given her £5,000. Charles had scarcely expected any money, and was agreeably surprised at the fortune, small though it was. Mr. Leicester went with Charles to choose the furniture for the small house, which Charles had taken agreeably to Mr. Leicester's wishes. River Vale had been in the possession of an old bachelor, who had lived there for a great many years. He was a prim, tidy gentleman, and had always insisted on having every thing more perfectly arranged. His little garden was beautifully kept. No weeds ever were allowed to show themselves in his grounds, and woe to the unfortunate child that dared to trample on his borders. He was sure to have an hour's lecture on the impropriety of his conduct. Old Mr. Carey was just as particular about every nook and corner of his house. No spiders were ever permitted to locate themselves in his premises; every thing must be spotlessly clean. His servants proclaimed that it was utterly impossible to live with him, and he changed them nearly every week. He had died about the time Charles went to Castle Clinton, and the house was to be let since. It was in such perfect order that Charles required to make no outlay for putting it in proper trim. The house was very small; a tiny drawing-room, a dining-room to match, and a small study, composed one floor; and three bedrooms above, and a fair basement story, completed it. What a contrast to beautiful Warrenstown, with its large mul-tioned windows, fine long oaken floors, and splendid library. But Charles felt Mary was indeed a prize far beyond five mansions and splendid places; and he felt happy, and told every one how fortunate he was; and he laughed at the smallness of the house, and said that perhaps it was all for the best, as they would never be far asunder, Mary smiled when she was taken to see the place; and she laughingly told Charles that the house was her beau-ideal of 'love in a cot'—off spoken of by poets; and she remarked how beautiful the scenery was, and how fresh was the sound of the small river; and she looked pleased and happy.

Mr. Leicester kept his promise generously of furnishing the house, and he went himself every day to inspect proceedings. It was marvellous the interest he took in every detail belonging to it; but he never saw Mary Power. One day he was close to the house, and happened to hear that Mary was there; he turned back and walked home again. When Mary heard this she felt very sorry, and fretted, and thought she must have acted very badly, else he would not treat her thus; and she begged of Charles to go to him the next day, and ask him if he was still angry with her, and say how sorry she was if she had used him ill. Charles went to see him as he was desired to do, but heard that he had left home that morning, and would not return for three months. The next day there came a short epistle to Charles from Mr. Leicester, stating that he was on his road to France and Italy, and that he hoped ere his return he would hear that he and Mary were happily married; that his place was at their disposal till their new home was quite ready for them. He finished by desiring his kindest wishes and regards for Mary, and an earnest hope that she might be as happy as she deserved to be.

Mary felt happy on receiving this letter. It was evident that Mr. Leicester could not be very angry with her, neither did he show any disapprobation; quite the contrary. The wedding-day arrived; Mr. Power, to show how little he liked the marriage, desired that it should be perfectly private. He did not wish, indeed, that the county should be invited to see his daughter 'made a beggar of.' The parties most concerned cared little for externals.—They were to be married at last; that was all they wished for. The marriage took place in the little church at Kilmoyle. Three carriages alone went, containing the Power family and Kate. The service was soon over. To Charles and Mary it was a deeply affecting one. They looked back to the first time that they had knelt and prayed in that same church about a year before. She was the lovely girl, the admired belle of the county, rich, honored, loved; with suitors innumerable, many of whom knelt near her, and waited till she should have finished her orisons ere they rose to leave the chapel; and how

many changes had come over the world since! Charles then trembled lest his father should prove the insuperable barrier from his too great love of wealth: and how that Mammon worship had since met with severe castigation! He no doubt had since encountered tremendous obstacles, but not from the quarter in which he had most expected them; and at last these obstacles were surmounted, and he could call the object of his affections by the endearing name of wife. He had gained one advantage, however, from his sufferings; he became aware of the deep, earnest, enduring love which Mary felt for him, and he rejoiced in the consciousness.—After the wedding was over, the young couple went for two or three days to Killarney, and then took up their residence temporarily at Mr. Leicester's place. River Vale was, however, very soon ready for the reception of the happy young couple; for happy they were, spite of all 'the miseries of their condition,' as Mr. Power called their small means.

Charles worked hard at Mr. Leicester's land; inspected the making of improvements, draining, and fencing; besides which he often found his way to the mines, and felt happy in imagining the wealth to be derived from them, and how his dear friend and ever-loved sister would soon have their wishes realized. Kate took her departure from Castle Clinton almost immediately after the celebration of the marriage, and she went to live with her brother at River Vale. She tried to make herself happy and at home in the small house, and to forget how very small it was.

Fitz-James was getting strong; and the tide of his purse, which had ebbed to a very low state, had now turned, and was again being replenished; he was all anxiety that the marriage should take place without delay. Every arrangement was made to expedite the union.

Kate had, long before this, once spoken to Fitz-James about her fortune of £10,000, which she had given to her family. She coolly told him one day that she much feared an insuperable obstacle had arisen to their marriage; and after she had worked him up to a state of great curiosity, she had informed him that it only rested with him to break off the marriage, if he pleased for that she was penniless.

When Fitz-James heard this, he kissed her affectionately, and told her that he loved her ten times better for her selfishness, and applauded her for putting him into a fright.

'I wish,' said Kate, 'my father could know how mistaken he was when he said that money was your inducement to marry me. He told me you did not care for me personally, but only for Aunt's Kate's £10,000. I fear he never will thoroughly appreciate you. He thinks that people can't be happy without plenty of money; but we know what a mistake this is.'

Fitz-James often proposed to Kate that a little outlay should be made on Shanghaabab ere she became his wife, and he thought also she could afford to expend something upon it; but Kate always desired him to give up any such idea. She said she could be quite happy there, even should the paint be a little less white than it might be, or the decorations somewhat more old-fashioned than was quite the thing. Shanghaabab was a lovely place; nature had done her utmost to beautify it; art little or nothing; for the house, though large and rambling, was not handsome. But the trees were exquisite; the house stood on a hill, and below there was a lovely lake studded with very small islands.—This stretched a long distance, and was surrounded by beautiful mountains, which formed an exquisite background to the picture. It was indeed one of nature's favored spots, and no wonder Fitz-James took delight in showing it to his future bride. It was at a convenient distance from River Vale, and Fitz-James was able to walk there occasionally, though he sometimes found his strength exhausted by the exertion.

At length the long-expected, long-protracted wedding day was fixed. Lady Clinton had arranged that the *dejeuner* was to take place at Castle Clinton, and she quite delighted in the fuss and excitement it entailed. She gave Kate her wedding-dress, which consisted of white silk covered with Carrickmacross lace. Kate felt happy, and enjoyed the prospect before her, and used to imagine to herself how she would bring about a friendship and complete reconciliation between Fitz-James and her family; for she arranged to go to France with Fitz-James after the marriage to see her father and mother.

Mr. Ashwood had insisted on returning to Kate £2,500, which gave her £100 a year.—She for a long time refused to take it, and so did Fitz-James; but Mr. Ashwood, though a harsh man, and very unamiable, was just; and he could not bear that his daughter should perhaps suffer actual want on account of her generosity to him. Certainly the money was a boon, for though the mines were succeeding beyond the most sanguine expectations of those concerned, still

Fitz-James could not count on having much actually to spend from them for some time.

But a new misfortune now came to put a stop, at any rate for a while, to the oft-delayed nuptials. Kate received a letter from her sister Maria, imploring her to go at once to France, as their mother was dying. The doctors had pronounced that there was no hope of her recovery, and her earnest entreaty was that she might once again see Kate ere death closed her eyes for ever.

This was a terrible blow for Kate. It seemed to her as if heaven and earth were combined against her marriage. She resolved to leave River Vale that evening, and proceed directly through London to France. She took a sad leave of Fitz-James. He was in desperately low spirits; he loved Kate so ardently, and was thus doomed a second time to have the cup of happiness snatched from his lips on the very eve of being able to drink of it to the full. Twice had the wedding-dress been purchased for these espousals, and twice was it destined to lie by unheeded.

Kate had never been intensely fond of her mother. Mrs. Ashwood was always an exacting woman, and never either sought or obtained the affection of those around her. Her children always feared her displeasure. She required them to be proficient in every thing; and when they stopped short of perfection in any of their accomplishments, she was as disappointed as if no effort were made. She also kept her children much at a distance from her. She never had given them from their earliest youth what all need so much—sympathy; and though they were all dutiful and attentive to her, they rendered her more the homage due from a subject to his superior, than gave her the love and affection that should subsist between mother and child.—In her days of prosperity she had ever been worldly—fond of her wealth, her position, and her place; and when adversity threw its black cloud over her, she was not equal to its heavy weight; it lay heavily upon her, and at length crushed her. When she lay on her death-bed she thought of her children—of their devotedness to her, and she felt a compunction and remorse for the manner in which she had acted towards Kate. The last days of Sir George Fasten were ever present to her imagination, and the recollection that she had tried to induce Kate to join her fate to his preyed upon her.—It disturbed her in her dreams; it haunted her day-visions; and she felt an ardent longing to see Kate once more, and receive from her an assurance that she loved her, and would not ever connect her mother's memory with the efforts made to induce her to marry the baronet whose end was so disgraceful. Now that death was approaching her with rapid strides, she saw in bright colors how foolish and wrong she had been in seeking as she had done entirely for every thing that the world holds dear. Of what avail now was her affection for its glitter and pomp? Would death only defer its dire visit! she thought—such was her reflection even amidst her sorrow and sufferings—could she only live for a short time! But no; death is an unwelcome but determined intruder. She implored to live at least till Kate should arrive, that she might bid her adieu. That earnest prayer was heard.

CHAPTER XXX.

Maria was watching by her mother's dying bed, when the sound of a vehicle was heard stopping at the door of the little French house. Mrs. Ashwood was becoming very feeble, but heard the sound, and calling Maria to her, implored her to hasten Kate while she could still speak. The footsteps were heard outside the door, and Mrs. Ashwood seemed nervously agitated. At last the door opened, and Kate entered softly. She went over to her mother, and kissed her.

'God bless you, Kate!' said the dying woman; but the effort seemed too much. She caught a nervous grasp of Kate's arm. 'Kate, do you—love—me?' she said faintly, and with difficulty.

'Indeed, mother, I do,' replied the girl earnestly.

'I'm going!' said Mrs. Ashwood, dying.—Here she fell back on the pillow—for she had been slightly raised—she became deadly pale, and a sigh was heard. She opened her eyes and looked vaguely around, and then closed them.—She still kept hold of Kate's hand.

Her daughters thought she was asleep, and feared to disturb her. When next they looked at her face, a change had come over it. A horrible, awful change never, never to be forgotten. Mrs. Ashwood was dead.

Kate now exerted herself to the utmost to cheer her father and sister. Maria was so much overcome by the sorrows she had passed through, that her health was seriously affected. She who had been the gayest of the whole party, the flirt, the coquette, now seemed to have lost all care for life. She had become prematurely old; for

her step had lost its elasticity, her laugh had no longer its merry, cheerful, happy sound. She had suffered keenly, and these sufferings told on her slender frame.

Picardy had now such melancholy recollections for the Ashwood family, that they resolved to leave it at once, and go to some other part of France.

They went for a time to Belgium. While there they heard the long-wished-for intelligence that the creditors and shareholders of the bank had come to an arrangement at last. Mr. Ashwood was left the use of £400 a-year.

Edward's great ambition now was to buy back the estates. 'I have a great object in view,' thought he, 'if I can by my industry and perseverance buy back the estate. It may take years and tens of years; but still it may be done;—and henceforth he heeded not the dull monotony of Mr. McDougall's office. An object in life lay before him, and he hoped to achieve it.—What heeded he now that the office was intolerably stupid and close! What signified the early and late hours? Warrenstown might be bought back, and he could put up with anything. What signified Mrs. McDougall's formality and the dull dinners in Harley Street. Wealth was now his object, and he felt capable of enduring any privation to attain that. He cared naught for wealth but as a means of buying back Warrenstown.

Mr. McDougall was more and more pleased with him. He was so regular and attentive to business, especially since this new impetus was added to his previous exertions; Mr. McDougall thought of soon sending him on the mission to the West Indies, which to Edward's sanguine hopes seemed as a mine of untold wealth and hidden inexhaustible treasure.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Fitz-James every morning looked anxiously for the post-bag ever since Kate's departure.—He certainly did wish that Mrs. Ashwood should not die; and if it was not merely amiability and love for her that made him feel anxious on the subject, we must blame him for it. We are all mortal, and perhaps we would not wish to sound our own hearts too deeply, lest some half-hidden and concealed aversion rise up, and stand as our accusing angel.

After Kate had been absent about ten days, a letter arrived for Fitz-James. The black seal and deep mourning border convinced him, ere he opened the envelope, that Mrs. Ashwood was no more. And now of course the marriage must be put off. Kate simply mentioned that her mother had died; and that six months more must elapse ere she could complete what she so longed for.

Six months! thought Fitz-James; it seemed to him an eternity. 'Well,' said he to Lady Clinton when informing her of the delay, 'she was against me during her lifetime, and it seems as if she had resolved to die to oppose me.—What obstacles may not now arise, in the course of six months, to prevent my marriage? and he sank again into despondency.

Lady Clinton used her utmost endeavors to arouse him. She urged him to attend more to the mines, to think how soon the six months would expire; and also placed before him the fact that in six months' time, if everything succeeded as it promised to do, he would be much better able to meet the expenses of matrimonial life. Like a true woman, she tried to comfort and console, and was in part successful.

He went constantly also to River Vale, and derived much pleasure from the society of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Ashwood, as we must now call them.

Mr. Leicester returned home about six weeks after the marriage. He found that Charles had not been idle during his absence; every plan or suggestion he had made had been carefully carried out. Charles timidly invited him to River Vale. Mr. Leicester had long been nerving himself for this visit. For an old man's love is not light love, and he feared to meet the Mary Ashwood whom he had loved so deeply as Mary Power. He did not, however, wish to refuse Charles's request, and went there.

The little place looked very pretty. A few nice flower-beds were placed in front and at the rear of the house. The river, from which its name was derived, rushed impetuously down a ravine very near the house. The small fancy windows had pretty chintz curtains; and several flowers were arranged in fancy-pots in the recesses. The place smelt like an odoriferous bouquet.

Mary sat by an open window working; her hat lay by her side filled with simple wild-flowers, which she had gathered in the fields. She had become industrious since her marriage, and some article of wearing-apparel now occupied her busy fingers. She was singing in the joy of her heart a pretty little song. Mr. Leicester had often heard her sing in her girlish days, and the refrain sounded like the sweetest music:—

'For I'm happy, I'm happy, as my love is with me.'

He paused to listen. Mary could not see him, as a large shrub hid him from view, and the sound of her own singing prevented her from hearing the voices of Mr. Leicester and her husband. Mr. Leicester turned to Charles, saying, 'Well, Ashwood, it would have been a sin had I taken her from you. What business has an old fellow with a lovely young creature? I never should have heard her sing like that.'—He now became visible, and going to the open window shook hands warmly with Mary, and wished her joy.

She felt embarrassed; but when she perceived that he regarded her in a friendly manner, and that his shake of the hands was really hearty, her reserve gradually subsided. She thanked Mr. Leicester warmly for his kindness, and expressed a hope that he would often come to their tiny cottage. How Mary gave grace and elegance to this abode. She to Mr. Leicester's eyes seemed as if some goddess, as of yore had left her ethereal realms, and contented herself in some earthly habitation. She was so beautiful; and of that majestic queen-like beauty that conveyed the idea of being out of place in any but a princely mansion; but she was quite unconscious of this appearance. She thought not of her beauty. She was told by Charles how lovely she was; but supposed that that loveliness existed in his imagination. She was pleased that he should admire her; but cared naught for the attractions she might possess in the eyes of others.

Charles and his wife was the most complete example of 'love in a cot.' She, spite of her queen-like and majestic air, made the most perfect poor man's wife, and looked after such very undignified matters as house-keeping, and might often be seen mending her husband's clothes and darned stockings; not very ethereal occupations, certainly.

Mr. Power, who occasionally paid visits to his daughter, grumbled much at seeing her, as he expressed it, turned into a maid-of-all-work.—His horror was great at the stockings; but one morning he was perfectly overpowered when he saw Mary covering jam-pots. Mr. Power got angry, and went in quest of Charles, whom he found digging in the garden. This increased his wrath. He declared indignantly that his daughter was married to a pauper, and that they were beginning already to make their poverty apparent; and he stormed and grumbled, and at last left very angry indeed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

But little did Mr. Power know the immense service to be rendered to him by his son-in-law whom he despised. He had rendered himself very obnoxious to some of the tenants on his estate, and they resented his severity. Fitz-James was aroused in a very violent manner by the following incident: Mr. Power had an employe who was an extremely conscientious man. He was a sort of steward and bailiff, and had had the charge of any works on the Power estate. Mr. Power was engaged in draining to a very considerable extent; and he ordered this man to employ a large number of workmen, and give them small portions of the work by contract till the order was completed. The very heart of the Irishman recoils from task-work, and they were mostly all sulky, and discontented at the labor. They combined among themselves to do very little work, in the hope that the steward, seeing how very small were their earnings, would be induced to ask Mr. Power to either give the work by the day, or else contract for a larger sum. But James Higgins was not to be imposed upon, and the men soon discovered this.—They now became more dogged, and did still less work; still James Higgins was not moved. They then threatened him, and told him that many a man fared badly for doing half what they had done, and advised him to be careful.

James Higgins cared naught for their intimidation. He was a brave man, and as long as he did right, feared no one; and he told them so. But James Higgins was destined this time to receive a castigation for doing his duty.

A tea-party was arranged to take place at George Roe's, one of the men employed on the works; and think not, dear reader, that a tea-party meant the quiet assemblage of a few old folks to drink the simple, unoffending beverage, and talk a little pardonable gossip and scandal. But a tea-party of this nature was, of course, to include a great deal of whiskey-punch, and projects of revenge, or to use the technical expression, 'giving a little civilising' was to take the place of the discussions on 'what Miss So-and-so wore,' 'how the curate preached,' 'if the rector's wife's baby would recover from the measles,' or 'if Mrs. Somebody did not flirt shamefully.' Such like mild country-town tea-table talk was not the style of conversation in which the guests of George Roe indulged.—Abuse of the steward, and the means to be taken for chastising him, were the topics of conversa-