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KATE ASHWOOD.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Charles Ashwood was walking out a day or two after the intelligence of Mary Power's engagement with Mr. Leicester became public property. He had a book in his hand, and was not heeding whither he was going. He crossed several fields and many acres of plantation. He was, though occasionally reading, more occupied in meditating on his singular position, and on the cheering prospects for Kate's future life. After his walk had continued for upwards of an hour, when he was thinking of returning to Castle Clinton, when he caught sight of Power Court mansion not far off. He was in the plantation skirting the demesne. 'What evil genius brought me here?' said Charles to himself, as he endeavored to find some short cut which would take him directly out of a *voisinage* so little agreeable to his present circumstances. Just as he turned to retrace his steps, he saw a lady coming towards him. He recognised her at once—it was Mary Power! She came near him, and after the salutations which polite formality requires, she asked with the utmost *sang froid* how Mr. O'Brien was, if his sister were well, &c.

Charles congratulated her on her approaching marriage. Mary thanked him coldly. The two (what shall we call them?) *à-dévant* lovers then walked on, scarcely speaking. Each wished that the other would say something, and both felt conscious that anything they did say would be awkward. At length Charles could bear it no longer. He felt this must be their last interview; she now belonged to another; but he did not wish that they should part in ill-will. He desired also that she should at least know that he was not to blame: that he was not the guilty, heartless wretch she might imagine him to be.—He wished that, if in years to come her thoughts should refer to him, she should at least regard him without reproach. He at length broke silence by saying:

'Miss Power, believe me when I say none of your friends wish from their hearts more earnestly than I do that you may be happy in your new home; and may I express a hope, should your thoughts ever for one moment revert to an unworthy being like myself, it will not be with a feeling of anger or contempt? Hear me for this once ere you are pledged to another irrevocably. You may remember a time, not many months since, when I was on a visit at Shanganaabah? Here Mary colored deeply. 'I was constantly visiting here; and my pleasure, my happiness consisted in doing so. Often did I long to tell you all; how I loved you—how my whole thoughts were of you. Mr. O'Brien soon became aware of my affection; and as he had learned from sad experience that prudence is a necessary virtue, he advised me to go to my father, lay my case before him, and obtain his consent. I therefore hastily quitted Shanganaabah, and returned to Warrenstown, my father's place. I had not been there long when an unexpected calamity overpowered me. My father had invested a very large sum of money in Jefferson's bank; he received intelligence of its failure at a time when he least apprehended such a calamity. The moment I heard the sad news I thought of you, Miss Power; and of the impossibility of our marriage. I could not bear to tell my father of the intense agony this caused me. I complained of it only to my sister Kate; but I could not long complain. My generous-minded sister, as soon as she heard of the failure, gave up her entire fortune, £10,000, to my father, to do with it what he pleased; though she knew Fitz-James O'Brien's fortune was too small to allow of his marrying her without her having something on her side. We never expected the mines would prove so lucrative. I then made up my mind to complain no more, but to try to bear my misery as well as I could. I resolved never again to visit Ireland, yet found myself obliged to do so almost immediately after making this determination. Now you can well understand why I only visited once at Power Court, and how much that visit cost me. I now hope you will view my conduct favorably. This is, as I have said before, perchance the last time we may meet on earth. Say, at least, a word of kindness to me, that I may recall it in years to come, when you may be a happy wife and mother, and I may be, haply, a wretched wanderer, with no one to guide or love me. I have troubled you too long with the details of my sufferings. God bless you! and that you may never know aught but happiness will ever be my most earnest prayer.'

He now made an effort to tear himself away; but Mary Power took his hand in hers. 'Mr. Ashwood, Charles!' she replied; 'why did you not speak to me in this way before? I will not conceal from you now that I was hurt by your apparent trifling with me. I did not suppose that I was frivolous enough to give any one encouragement to trust me in the manner I imagined you did. I must and will owe you were not forgotten by me as easily as you think.—

But where is the use of such confessions now? Dearest Charles, forget me. Go where you will meet others; and you will find some one who will requite your affection far better than I should have done. But I feel as if I were guilty of treachery in thus talking to you of bygone times; I feel as if I were not acting fairly by Mr. Leicester. You know he loves me very much; and if I don't love him as deeply and affectionately as he deserves, I at least respect him very much. I look up to him as the model of all that is kind and generous. I must tell him of this conversation. He won't, I think, be angry with me; and yet he is jealous, very jealous. Mr. Ashwood, I must say good-bye: I must ask you to leave me.'

Here her tremendous effort at self-control and reserve, which had till then upheld her, forsook her, and she cried and sobbed convulsively.—She could not be prudish with Charles; she was betrayed into showing him all the interior of her heart's affections, and her effort at concealment had failed. She felt she was wrong in thus giving way; but she could not help it, and she consoled herself with the reflection that she would tell every word of it to Mr. Leicester, and ask him not to be angry with her. The idea of breaking her word to Mr. Leicester never entered her head. She had promised to marry him, and must of course abide by the promise.

Charles now felt he loved her doubly. How was he to resign so lovely a creature, and that too at a moment when he knew without doubt that she loved him! What could he do but leave her at once? Was it honorable in him to remain with her now that he was conscious of her affection, and that she was at the same time the affianced bride of another? Was it right—was it manly—to tarry thus, after being desired by her to leave? He took her hand in his, and pressed it warmly; then pressed his lips on it, and with one 'Good-bye! God bless you!' tore himself away. He felt, on the whole, lighter in spirits than when he entered the plantation.—The feeling of affection reciprocated is naturally a consoling one.

When next Mr. Leicester visited Power Court, Mary looked miserable and wretched, and out of spirits; and Mr. Leicester asked her to accompany him on a walk through the gardens, that he might have the pleasure of a *tête-à-tête* conversation with her. When they were alone, he asked her to let him know what made her look so wretched. She hung down her head, and blushed deeply. He then implored her to let him know if he had vexed her in any way. Was she dissatisfied with any of the matrimonial arrangements? Did she think his settlement too small?

'Oh, no, indeed, Mr. Leicester,' replied Mary—'you have been most kind to me in everything; but I fear you will consider me unworthy of your kindness. I must make a confession to you, which I dread doing: you will think badly of me. Long ago—that is, some months ago—Mr. Ashwood was on a visit to Mr. O'Brien, and he used to be here almost every day. He was very attentive to me; and I must own I had a partiality for him. He abruptly left Shanganaabah; and I was very angry with him, because I thought he had treated me very badly, and I resolved to think no more about him. He returned to Shanganaabah, and never came near me but once. I was very indignant; for no woman likes to be trifled with. Yesterday I accidentally met him in the woods, and he explained all. In consequence of some misfortunes he was not in a position to ask me to be his wife. I heard all this as calmly as I could; but when he took leave of me as he did, and told me how his heart was broken, I burst out crying, and owned to him all my feelings in his regard. Now, do you love me no longer?'

Mr. Leicester looked intensely pained. Till that moment he never imagined how he loved her, how his happiness was centred in her. At length he replied, 'How could you, dearest child, promise to marry me, when you loved another? I could not have expected this from you; I never, never would have asked to marry you, had I imagined for a moment that your heart was engaged. I was in hope you had never loved any one, and that the devotion of the remaining years of my life would have made you happy. I now free you entirely from your engagement; and if by my exertions or influence I can in any way further your marriage with the man you love, remember that in Philip Leicester you have a constant friend.'

He now left her. He did not know till he found himself at home how tremendous was the sacrifice to him. He knew not till he looked at his gardens, and remembered how he used to figure to himself Mary walking in them—his drawing-room, where he had planned alterations—that Mary's happiness was the object of all these plans. But his love was useless, and his next thought was how to make the girl happy, by joining her to the man she loved. 'I am an old man,' he thought, as he stood in front of his

looking-glass, 'and not a handsome one. I suppose it was too much to expect;' and that night kind Mr. Leicester lay awake, thinking how he could delicately provide some means by which the young couple might be married; and the thought struck him, 'I am too old to be running after tenants and collecting rents; what a comfort it would be to have a smart young fellow to collect them for me! A little travelling might do me good, and I can leave the young people to manage my affairs while I am away;—and perhaps they might like the house to begin life in. There would be nothing in young Ashwood's living in the house as my agent; at any rate for a while, till they have time to look about them. Well, it is a comfort to have money when it makes young people happy.' Such was Mr. Leicester's soliloquy; and indeed every young lady in the county was in love with him when they heard of his kindness.

The next morning he went as early as he could to Castle Clinton, and asked to see Charles. They were not intimate with each other; indeed had only met about three or four times. Charles could not imagine what the purport of the visit might be, when informed that Mr. Leicester was waiting to see him. Could he want to call him out? But duelling was out of fashion; at any rate he was prepared for a very disagreeable visitor. What was his surprise, when, on entering the library, he was met by a cheerful cordial smile on one of the most benevolent of faces, and a hearty voice (from which a strong brogue did not detract any of the natural sweetness) exclaimed, 'Well, Mr. Ashwood, I am happy to renew our acquaintance.'

Charles was astonished. This was not the usual manner in which rivals meet; he was quite taken aback.

'You are, no doubt,' continued Mr. Leicester, 'astonished at meeting me here. I have come to make a proposal to you, which I hope you won't decline. You are aware that Miss Power acceded to my request that she should become my wife?'

Charles bowed acquiescently. 'I yesterday discovered that her affections were engaged to you, though verbally they were pledged to me. As soon as this became known, to me, I immediately resigned all claim to her hand. She also let me into her confidence on one subject—and I hope I am not abusing it by here alluding to the fact—that you told her you had intended to have proposed for her, were it not for the failure of a bank, by which your father lost a great deal of his property. It has occurred to me that you might not consider yourself insulted, were I to ask you to undertake the management of my property at a salary of £600 a year. Perhaps you may consider this beneath your notice; but it is enough to begin housekeeping upon. Do you understand me now? You may have difficulty in persuading old Power to consent to this at first; but I will back you up.'

Charles was so overpowered he could scarcely reply; this generosity of Mr. Leicester's amazed him. Just at the moment when he had made up his mind to return to England in despair, to find a kind friend who would put him in the way of enjoying the most complete worldly happiness. He thanked him warmly and earnestly over and over again.

'Oh, no thanks,' said Mr. Leicester; 'to see you and Mary happy together is all I ask. I mean to go abroad for a while and stretch my legs, and see a little of the world; and you can both have my house till I return. Meanwhile there is a pretty little place not far from this to be let; I think it would just suit. You can get this in order by the time I come back, and I mean to furnish it as a wedding present for Mary. Now I must be off,' continued he; for he did not wish to cause to Charles further embarrassment. He felt happy in the knowledge of having made others so. No one guessed all it had cost him to give up Mary; no one could read his noble heart, and decipher, written therein, that Mary Power was the only one that had ever lodged there, and that he loved her with an intense depth of love; but so pure, so unalloyed was his affection, that he longed for her happiness alone; and if his life-blood had been a bar to it, he would have cheerfully given every drop.

He now drove to Power Court; and without asking to see Mary, he requested an interview with Mr. Power, whom he certainly found as difficult to deal with as he expected. He first refused point-blank to listen to the proposal Mr. Leicester made him; told him never to mention Mr. Ashwood's name, and said that he had never spoken to his daughter since she had shamefully jilted him.

Mr. Leicester here interposed, and told Mr. Power that Mary had never for a moment dreamt of giving him up. She had only told him of her meeting with Charles because she considered she was acting rightly in doing so, and that she thought any concealment from him

of such a nature would be very wrong. 'That he had desired her on the spot to consider herself free henceforth, as he could not bear to think that she only married him from a sense of honor.'

Mr. Power was puzzled; he knew not what to do; he could not but admire Mr. Leicester's generosity of mind, and he did not at all regret that the union between his daughter and Mr. Leicester should not come off, as he had objections to it on the score of family; but that young Ashwood, who had nothing but this Mr. Leicester's agency, should be the substitute, was too bad. His eldest daughter to make such a bad match! He could not think of it; and told Mr. Leicester so.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Mr. Power's consent seemed hopeless; but Mr. Leicester was bent on his philanthropic purpose, and was not to be turned from it. He visited Mr. Power a second time, and told him that he had heard upon good authority that the Ashwoods were people of very old family; that they were highly connected, and altogether most eligible in every way but the one of money; and indeed till lately they were extremely well off. Mr. Power could not understand Mr. Leicester, he was a new character; he could not enter into such unselfishness. He did not appreciate it.—In vain Mr. Leicester represented to him that the happiness of his daughter was at stake. He looked grim, angry, and irritable.

At last Charles determined to face Mr. Power himself. He urged his point in the most determined manner; he pleaded Mary's affection for him. Mr. Power somewhat relented. He thought of inducing Mary herself to come with him to her father, and join her petitions to his. Eventually Mr. Power was teased into a tardy acquiescence. The young people were determined to lose no time in being married, when the consent was unwillingly wrung from him.

Mr. Leicester now took Charles about with him to his different farms, showed him improvements and alterations which he wished made in his absence in farmsteads, initiated him into the peculiarities of rent-collecting in Ireland, and of the judicious management of tenantry and workmen. He wished Charles to become quite *au fait* at everything before his departure. Many remarked though he seemed to take the greatest interest in every thing relating to the marriage, and had done every thing in his power to induce Mr. Power to give the required permission, still he never once asked to see Mary since the conversation which took place in the garden, when she owned she loved Charles. He had been at the house twice, but studiously avoided her.—Mary thought it curious, and was half-afraid he was angry with her, and thought badly of her, and that nothing but his characteristic benevolence prompted him in the way he did. She was mistaken. Mr. Leicester still loved her, and though he, from affection for her, surrendered the position of her lover, he had not completely buried the feelings of one; and he respected and admired her more than he had ever done, since she had made the confession to him of her love for another in the simple candid way she did. On this account he did not wish to see her, till he had completely overcome all the sentiments of romantic affection, and till he could calmly regard her as belonging to another. It may seem strange that he so suddenly took the step he did with regard to Charles; but Mr. Leicester feared his own resolution, and thought it better to take a decisive step on the spot.

Mary did not find her home happy after the break-off of the one engagement and the formation of another. Mr. Power grumbled perpetually, and made sundry allusions to pauperism, and the folly of marrying in poverty; the expenses of bringing up a family, and such-like disagreeable remarks. Mary sighed, and wished that papa would be more satisfied; but he would not; he growled on.

But, dear Mr. Power, look around you, and see how many people are happy on small means; and now that Britannia and electro-plate are substituted for silver, and that mahogany is so cheap, they oftentimes contrive to make a very respectable appearance. So why prognosticate nothing but ill? Why not put on a cheerful face, and tell Mary all she can do if she manages properly? Look at Captain and Mrs. Perse. What a miserable life they lead, though they have ten thousand pounds a year.—He leaves her perpetually to her own resources, and seldom gives her his company, save when he has something to worry her about. He is angry because he has no son, and he considers himself ill-used in consequence. She—poor thing— frets, and laments that she has none, and tries to derive comfort from her two daughters; but they are sickly, and every one says they can't live. Besides which, they are made so unhappy they can't be joyous when their father is at home, and their mother, though very good, is most austere, and thinks every amusement sinful.—

There is no doubt, my dear sir, you would like a perfection of a husband for your daughter, with every possible personal, as well as superficial, advantage; but ask all the fathers-in-law in the United Kingdom if they got everything they desired for their daughters. They will all, in a body, say no.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Meanwhile the inhabitants of Warrenstown were trying to make some arrangements with the creditors of Jefferson's bank. The failure was, as we have before remarked, for a very large sum of money; but as some of the shareholders were very wealthy, Mr. Ashwood hoped and with reason, that some residue of his property might be left to him. His wife's fortune was also safe; but that was not very extensive. In the present case, however, it was of great value to the family. Maria and Edward were the only children he had at home.

Edward Ashwood went to London to see after the business affairs; but they were long and tedious. His heart sickened within him, as he thought of the commission he was to have had in the Dragoons. He had just passed his examination with fair success; and when walking in the Park he saw a detachment of them riding by; he felt his disappointment was hard to bear.—What was he to turn to now? He met a young fellow of eighteen, who had passed his examination at the same time.

'Well, Ashwood,' said he, clapping him on the back, 'what are you in? I am posted to the —th, and am off to Canada to-morrow.'

Edward looked much annoyed. At last he said, sally, 'I must give up my chance. My father had shares in Jefferson's bank; it need not say anything more.'

'Well, that is too bad,' said young Smith, sadly. 'Come home and dine with my father; he will be glad to see you.'

Edward accompanied his friend to his father's house at Putney. It was a fine villa-residence; a large house standing on thirteen acres of land, two of which were gardens and pleasure-grounds, the remainder made a tiny model farm.

Edward was received with a warm welcome by Mr. and Mrs. Smith, and their four grown daughters and three sons. These were all that were at first visible; but after dinner no end of little Smiths came pouring down from the nursery and schoolroom; and lastly entered Made-moiselle Dudeemps, a fashionable French governess, who did her utmost to rein in the six small Smiths, who were continually shouting French and English at the top of their voices. Edward had never met with such a large family before. He was entertained with the variety. He had not met a friendly face since he went to London; and the genuine heartiness and cordiality of the Smith family pleased him.

The head of the house had made his money in the tea-trade. He began life by keeping a little shop in a small street, where he and his better-half stood behind the counter weighing out tea and sugar by the ounce or pound, as the case may be, and bowing obsequiously to the stray customer who owned a carriage. By degrees the small shop prospered and the Smiths went to a much larger one, and sported plate-glass; and the carriages that stopped at their door became more numerous. By degrees their less fortunate or older-established neighbors on either side failed or retired, and Mr. Smith became the owner of three or four shops; increased the size of his windows, sold tea by the large canister, and had orders from several members of the nobility.—In fact, the prosperity of the Smiths knew no bounds. Year after year their possessions increased; and about the time when Edward came to London, Mr. Smith entertained very serious notions of selling his business and making gentlemen of his sons.

John, who had become acquainted with Edward at the army-examination, had just obtained his commission. Frederick and Henry had heretofore assisted their father in the management of the shop; but they did not like it. It certainly was awkward to meet young ladies, whom they were superintending the sorting of teas, unloading of carts, and many other things appertaining to their business. Some of the men with whom they were acquainted occasionally encountered them while they were similarly engaged, and looked upon them ever after with contempt.—At first old Smith laughed at his sons, and endeavored to persuade them that people would respect them for attending to business; but by degrees he entered into their views; and Mrs. Smith being somewhat of the same way of thinking, there were serious thoughts of abandoning the ladder by the steps of which the ungrateful Smith family had climbed to fortune.

John Smith's prospects came on the tapis during the evening alluded to. He was full of enthusiasm at the prospect before him of a journey to Canada and the delight of army life.—Edward was made more unhappy and dismal when he thought of how the failure of the Jef-