

"There is nowhere to walk, Kate—you had better sit still," says Sophy. But Kate is determined, and Mr. Proctor—eager to fulfil any desire of hers—has descended, and is ready to assist her to the ground. She does not observe that at this instant Tarleton and Miss Vaughn are crossing the track on their return, but giving him her hand, she springs lightly down, takes his arm, and turns away.

So it chances that when Tarleton makes his appearance at the side of the phaeton, he finds, to his great dismay, that the bird is flown. His countenance expresses his dismay so plainly, that Sophy says:

"Kate has not been gone longer than a minute, Frank. I told her that it was absurd—that there was nowhere to go, but she insisted upon getting out, and you know that Mr. Proctor would do anything she bade him."

"They will be back before long," says Wilmer. "Rambling about among carriage-poles and horses' feet can't possibly prove a lively amusement. Tarleton, accept my warmest congratulations on Bonny Kate's victory."

"And mine," says Sophy.

"And mine, Mr. Tarleton," cries Carrie Norton.

Tarleton makes his acknowledgments rather absently. He is wondering what Kate means. She must have seen him coming, he thinks; so the presumption is, that she went away on purpose to avoid him. "All women are unreasonable alike!" he thinks, a little angrily. "As if by anything short of positive rudeness I could have avoided being taken possession of by Florida Vaughn! She might have known that."

He cannot linger long, for another race is coming off, and he is forced to go away without seeing her. It is now his turn to feel injured. Such an exhibition of resentment, or else such a proof of carelessness, is unlike her, he thinks; while, although he would smile with scorn at the idea of being jealous of Mr. Proctor, it is impossible to forget that the worldly advantages of that most excellent young man are much greater than his own. He has been struck by a something of coldness in Mr. Lawrence's manner whenever they have met to-day, and this, together with the suggestions of his own conscience, gives him a subtle sense of uneasiness.

Meeting Randal on the quarter-stretch just before the next race comes off, he pauses to say:

"It strikes me as a little odd, Randal, that Vaughn should be betting so heavily against Cavalier, when only the other day he was anxious to buy him."

Randal shrugs his shoulders. "It is true he was anxious to buy him," he answers, "but you remember that he didn't think him worth your price, and I am sure he believes Orion to be the better horse of the two. He has backed his opinion too heavily not to believe it."

"I have no doubt he believes it," Tarleton replies; "but he is greatly mistaken."

"Very likely," says the other, carelessly. "I don't profess to be a judge myself."

There are two more races, and then the day's programme being at an end, the motley crowd is beginning to stream from the ground, when Tarleton makes his appearance at the side of the Wilmer phaeton. Here he finds Kate, and has at last the pleasure of holding her hand, and seeing the lovely rose-blush rise to her cheeks, and her eyes grow softly luminous. Both have been vexed, and have fancied ground for injured feeling in the blunders that have kept them apart; but all sense of these things vanishes as if by magic when they find themselves together, hand clasping hand, glance answering glance. For a little while nobody observes them. The devoted Mr. Proctor is absent—having been called upon to escort back to her own carriage a young lady who occupied Kate's seat during her absence—the Lawrence equipage has driven away, Wilmer and Sophy are intent on a conversation with one or two lounging friends. So, Tarleton has time for a few words, and Kate has time to answer them.

The minutes are all too short. Mr. Proctor returns, the horses grow impatient; Wilmer says, "We must be off!" and Sophy adds, "Won't you come with us, Frank?"

Tarleton shakes his head, as Kate's eyes second the invitation. "Impossible!" he says. "I am detained here, but I will see you again to-morrow."

He draws back, and as the carriage drives off, Kate turns—the lingering smile which he has awakened still on her lips—and waves her hand to him. For many a long day he recalls that gesture, and the fair face, with its tender radiance.

CHAPTER XXI.

"When the lamp is shattered
The light in the dust lies dead."

Whatever those few words of Tarleton's may have been, there is no denying their magical effect. The cloud which has hung over Kate for several hours is swept away, the light has come back to her eyes, the color to her cheeks. During the homeward drive, her spirits are at their gayest, and as Mr. Proctor hears her laugh ring out its sweet music, he falls more deeply in love than ever. He is not the first man on whom have overflowed some gleams of a sunshine in which he has no part, nor the first who has mistaken this gladness for a token of encouragement. In truth, he is not greatly to blame for doing so. Such joyousness must deceive a more experienced wooer—for by what sign can he tell that it is in honour of another and an absent man?

The drive to Fairfields is delightful. There is no heat in the brightness of the sun as he slopes toward his bed of glory, the horses travel admirably, the phaeton rolls along the smooth roads as if on velvet, out of the golden west fresh breezes come, far and fair the rolling prospect spreads, melting into purple softness. The pleasant minutes come quickly to an end, however. Very soon the gallant grays turn into the Fairfields gate, and a minute or two later draw up before the entrance to the house. The girls are assisted to alight, and as Sophy pauses on the piazza, she says:

"It has been a pleasant day, has it not?"

"Yes, it has been pleasant," answers Kate, "but to-morrow will be pleasanter."

"Don't be sure," says Sophy. "When we anticipate pleasures, they generally disappoint us."

"I shall not be disappointed," answers Kate, with a laugh. She feels so certain of this, and so light of heart, that as she enters the hall and goes up-stairs, she sings as gayly and instinctively as a bird.

"Sae true his words, sae smooth his speech,
His breath like caller air,
His very foot has music in't
As he comes up the stair.
And will I see his face again?
And will I hear him speak again?
I'm downright dizzy with the thought,
In troth I'm like to greet."

This is what rises to her lips, and Miss Brooke, hearing the lilting tones as they pass her room, smiles to herself. "What April moods the child has!" she thinks. "What a very child she is! Surely it will not be difficult to teach her to forget any fancy that she may have conceived here."

"You are certainly an extraordinary girl!" says Janet, as Kate enters the room where she is making her toilet for dinner. "When I left the race-course, you looked as if you had discovered the emptiness of the world and the vanity of all pleasures. Now you are ready for a dance or a fox-hunt! Pray, what change has come over you?"

"Can't one's spirits vary a little?" demands Kate. "I was tired on the race-course. So much glare, and noise, and dust, made my head ache, but the drive from Arlingford has been charming."

"Indeed!" Janet glances at her keenly. "Has Mr. Proctor been charming, also?"

"Mr. Proctor?—I did not even think of him. He might just as well not have existed for all that I knew to the contrary."

"How pleased he would be to hear you say so! But may I inquire what was engrossing your thoughts?—you are usually well enough aware of the neighborhood of an admirer."

"Am I?" says Kate, indifferently. She is standing before the mirror, looking with stary eyes at her own radiant image, rejoicing in her fair looks not from vanity, but because they have had a share, at least, in winning for her the gift which glorifies her life. "I don't know," she goes on, absently. "I was not thinking of him—that was all."

"And I can tell why you were not thinking of him," says Janet, going up to her, and speaking impressively. "You saw Frank Tarleton before you left the race-course."

A blush mounts to Kate's face, but she tries to smile carelessly. "What if I did?" she asks. "Surely there was no reason why I should not have seen him."

"And I will tell you something else," Janet continues, with her searching gaze bent full on the color-flushed, tell-tale countenance. "You are—O Kate, Kate, don't try to deny it!—you are in love with him."

Silence for a minute. Then Kate flings her arms impulsively round her accuser, and buries her face on her shoulder. Whether she is laughing, or whether she is crying, or whether she is doing both together, Janet cannot tell; but some form of emotion is shaking the slender frame, giving an answer clearer than speech.

Janet is so dismayed, that she is almost driven to cry herself. "Oh, my dear, my dear," she says, "I am so sorry, so very sorry! I was afraid of it from the first—I warned you—you know I warned you—O Kate, it will never do!"

"But it will do!" says Kate, without lifting her face. "Don't—please, don't—ask me any questions, Janet; but I am not so mad as you think. I have not given my heart without—O Janet, it will do!"

"Will it?" asks Janet. "Has it gone so far as that? Has he spoken, and have you answered? I Kate, you will surely tell me the truth."

"I will not tell you anything else," answers Kate, lifting now her April face, on which tears and smiles are mingled; "and therefore I shall tell you nothing. Wait a little while—a very little while—and then you shall hear everything."

Janet shakes her head. "I don't like concealment," she says, "and I am sure you would never think of it if it had not been suggested to you. Remember this—a man worth loving would never woo the woman he loved under any cover of secrecy."

"I think you hardly know the tender rhyme
Of 'trust me not at all, or all in all,'" says Kate, with a smile. "I know it, and if—if I am foolish or mistaken, I shall suffer enough, you may be sure. Let me be happy, then, while I may."

And something in the appeal, or in the eyes which second it, goes so straight to Janet's heart, that she can say no more.

Meanwhile, Mr. Proctor is making up his mind that it will be tempting Providence to de-

lay his declaration any longer. No one, he assures himself, could ask for more encouragement than he has received since his return. His heart warms as he remembers the eagerness with which Kate welcomed him when they met so unexpectedly in the woods, and her enchanting brightness during their drive. "I will speak to her this evening," he thinks, bracing his courage to the venture.

Dinner over, he takes his way to the drawing-room, with the firm intention of executing this resolution. As he smoked a cigar on the piazza, he saw a delicate new moon hanging over the dark crest of the hill behind the house, and it occurs to him that he will ask Kate to come and look at this phenomenon. They will, of course, walk toward the garden, and then—then the matter can be settled. Solitude, semi-darkness, a distant moon—what more could any lover desire to make an effective background for a proposal?

The best-laid plans, however, "gang aft aglee." While he has been deciding on his line of strategy, Miss Vaughn has taken her seat by Kate's side in the drawing-room, and opens a conversation.

"Are you not tired?" she asks. "I think nothing is more fatiguing than such a day as this has been. The morning was passed in a state of anticipation, then, after we had attired ourselves in our most ravissant costumes, we drove five or six miles over dusty roads to sit in a crowd for several hours, and watch some races in which we felt not the least interest."

"What a summing up of our day's amusement!" says Kate, with a laugh. "But do not races interest you? I think they are exciting."

"They might interest me if I had anything staked on them, and if I knew anything of the horses besides their names. If I were a man, very likely I should be a turf-gambler; but, as a woman, I consider the whole thing a simple bore."

"Then why inflict such boredom on yourself?"

"Because half the amusements of society are bores; but one must endure them if one means to live in society at all."

"Must one? That is not a pleasant prospect."

"Ah, you will not find them bores. You will think them everything that is charming. You are not only fresh and enthusiastic now, but I think you are one of the people who will remain fresh and enthusiastic to the end."

Kate is doubtful whether or not to consider this in the light of a compliment. It is seldom that people who are fresh like to be informed of the fact. When the charm is genuine, it is inclined to be ashamed of itself.

"I hope I am not gushing," she says.

"That is very absurd. But I am sure I should enjoy the pleasures of society—if I knew them."

"Why not say, when you know them—for it is plainly on the cards that you are to know them before long."

"I am not sure of that."

"Not sure?"—the brilliant eyes regard her closely. "Excuse me, but I thought I understood from Miss Brooke that you would accompany her when she leaves Fairfields?"

"Miss Brooke has kindly asked me to do so, and—and I have thought of it," answers Kate, "but nothing is settled."

"I am glad to hear you say so. If nothing is settled, I feel at liberty to make another proposal to you. Don't look so startled! It is not nearly so tremendous as the one with which that poor man yonder is charged."

She glances, as she speaks, towards Mr. Proctor, who, entering at the moment, looks crestfallen when he sees that Kate's attention is already engaged.

"He will be over here in a minute," Miss Vaughn goes on, "and, since I have something of importance to say, will you come to my room? We shall be safe from interruption there, and I promised not to detain you long."

Kate would fain decline to go, but not being trained to that useful habit of society which is never at a loss for an excuse in an emergency, she can find no reason for refusing. Consequently, Mr. Proctor, on his way to her, with the moon, so to speak, on the end of his tongue, has the pleasure of meeting her in the middle of the room, and of hearing Miss Vaughn say:

"I am going to carry Kate off for a little while, Mr. Proctor. You must forgive me and bear the desolation of her absence as well as you can."

"I hope it will not be a long absence," says Mr. Proctor. "There is a—new moon; and I hope—that is, I thought Miss Kate might look at it."

"Are new moons uncommon in this part of the country?" asks Miss Vaughn, "or is it only another form of 'Come into the garden, Maud?' I can't trust her with you! If she went out to look at the moon with so fascinating a companion as yourself, I fear I should be entirely forgotten. What I have, I generally find it safest to keep."

She smiles, and draws Kate on. When they have crossed the hall, and are ascending the staircase, she says, "I think you owe me thanks for that. The clumsy creature! To fancy that anybody would not know what he meant by talking of the moon! Are you fond of declarations, or do you agree with me in thinking them generally tiresome?"

"I have had no experience—" Kate begins, but stops short, remembering what very late experience she has had.

"I see your conscience will not let you finish that speech," says her companion. "Indeed, I know of one declaration which you have had, and treated very badly, too. Don't fancy that I resent it, however," she adds. "Such things will be while the world is what it is. People call me heartless, but I have found that women injure men very little, in comparison with the injuries which men inflict on women—and, therefore, I reserve any sympathy or compassion of which I may be possessed for women. Come in! Let us make ourselves comfortable, for I have a great deal to say to you."

She opens the door of her chamber as she speaks, revealing a pretty rose-glow of firelight within. "I am an absolute salamander," she says, "and find a fire pleasant on many nights when other people never think of it. Don't you agree with me that this is better than the garden and the moon?"

"I am afraid I am not sentimental enough to answer No," says Kate. "The garden is very well on a warm night, with a pleasant companion; but autumn nights are chilly, and Mr. Proctor is—a trifle tedious."

"Ah, yes, a pleasant companion makes all the difference in life in everything," says Miss Vaughn, drawing a chair forward. She sinks into it, and, gazing into the fire, goes on, with something between a smile and a sigh:

"How large the white moon looked, dear!
There has not ever been
Since those old nights the same great light
In the moons which I have seen.
I often wonder when I think
If you have thought so too,
And the moonlight has grown dimmer, dear,
Then it used to be to you."

You see I can be sentimental, too," she adds, with a slight, careless laugh. "I suppose moonlight grows dimmer to all of us as we grow older; and very fortunately so. Romance is a pleasant thing at seventeen, but we can't remain seventeen forever; and after a while we learn that it plays a very small part in the business of life. Now, my pretty Kate, I am going to speak to you very seriously; for, besides being your cousin, I am somewhat older than yourself in years, and immensely older in experience. To begin with, tell me frankly why you refused my brother."

"Because I care nothing for him," answers Kate, with uncompromising sincerity.

Miss Vaughn is not able to restrain a smile which rises to her lips—such a smile as might be provoked by the ignorant folly of a child. "As if that had anything to do with it!" her expression plainly says; and Kate is quick enough to catch its meaning.

"You may think such a reason a very poor one," she says, "but to me it seems the best possible."

"Pardon me," says Miss Vaughn. "Your reason is a very good one—at nineteen. But at twenty-five, you will think it a very poor one. How absurd it seems," the speaker goes on, "to put into the hands of a girl hardly escaped from childhood, and full of the crude sentiment of youth, a decision which will affect the whole course of her life—and probably of many other lives! Such affairs are better managed in France. But one must take these things as one finds them, and I hope you will prove that you have more sense than most girls of your age, by listening reasonably to me."

"I will listen to you," says Kate, "but you will never convince me that it is well to marry a man whom I dislike—whom I do not like at all."

"Liking, my dear," says the other, calmly, "is, with most women, a mere matter of association. Their domestic instincts are so strong that they soon grow to love any man whom they marry—and when I speak of love, of course, I mean a rational, sober affection, not a whirlwind passion. Now, there are few men so well fitted to make an agreeable husband, as my brother. His disposition is amiable, his manners are refined, he is a thorough man of the world, and successful in whatever he undertakes. Moreover, he is sincerely attached to you, and, by accepting him, you will gratify every one concerned, and secure a large fortune—which certainly is not a trifling consideration."

Kate listens to the end of this speech, with her lips curling slightly. Then she says, "I am sorry to be obliged to tell you that you are wasting your words altogether. Your brother may be all that you say, but if he were that and ten times more, my answer would be the same—I cannot marry him."

"But why can you not?" persists Miss Vaughn. "Surely not merely because you have a sentimental idea that you are not sufficiently in love with him?"

Kate begins to think that this catechising has gone far enough, and she lifts her head proudly. "You must pardon me if I decline to be more explicit," she says. "I have said enough to assure you that I am in earnest. My reasons—if I have any further—concern only myself."

There follows a moment's silence. Miss Vaughn has yet to say that which she brought her companion away specially to hear; but she pauses—more at a loss how to open the subject than she would have believed possible. The brands drop apart on the earth, the strains of the piano float up from the drawing-room, and Kate moves as if with an intention of rising, before she speaks.

"Pray don't go! I have something else to say, but I fear you may think me presuming. Yet I mean it as a kindness, if you will only believe as much."