

deal which it is sad to remember. Most people would think the two things incompatible; but you—somehow I think you understand."

Again the fair face is turned up to him with an expression of trust. Something stirs at Fenwick's heart. Is it his fate which lies in the dark depths of those eyes? Will the hand now resting so near his heart hold that heart in its grasp for good or ill? The instinct embodied in these questions comes to him like a flash—yet he is sufficiently master of himself to answer, quietly:

"I am very sure that I understand. You like pleasure—every one of your temperament must like it—but your heart is none the less true as steel."

"Don't!" she says, with a little gasp. Everything seems to stab her with a recollection. It was Tarleton who uttered those words last, and she had answered, "I can be as hard as steel, too, if any one deceives me." He had deceived her—deceived her in a manner that no woman can forget or forgive—and yet she is weak enough to remember and regret him! A wave of self-contempt comes over her. Fenwick is almost startled by the change in her tone, as she goes on:

"Pardon me—but that was said last by a person I would rather not remember. Why is it that one cannot forget when one desires with all one's heart to do so?" she cries. "It seems so weak, so wretched, not to be able to control one's self."

"Are you just learning how difficult it is?" he asks. "You don't know what a fight you have entered upon. As for forgetting—I believe I said not long ago that it is necessary in life; but I may add that constancy is very beautiful and noble, as well as very rare."

"But not constancy when every impulse of pride and duty says forget. That is weakness, is it not?"

"I hardly think so. Victory does not come in a day to the bravest soldier." They have reached Miss Brooke's door by this time, and as he opens it and they enter the lighted hall, he pauses, and takes her hand. "Courage!" he says, with a smile. "If you are fighting in a good cause, you will win forgetfulness after a while. Thank you for having spoken to me so freely—and good-night."

CHAPTER XXXI.

"And what am I to you? A steady hand
To hold, a steadfast heart to trust withal;
Merely a man who loves you, and will stand
By you, whatever befall."

Miss Brooke sees a decided change in her nephew after this night. He enters into society as he has not done since his wife's death; and instead of leaving Kate almost entirely to her numerous cavaliers, he claims a fair—some of them think an unfair—share of her time and attention. People smile, and say to one another that the matrimonial plan may be regarded as an accomplished fact. Certainly Miss Brooke has every reason to be well pleased with the result of her scheme—and she is wise enough not to disturb it. She makes no opportunities to throw Kate and Fenwick together—indeed, such manœuvring is unnecessary, since, living in the same house, they can see as much of each other as they like.

As the days go on, their intimacy—the frank, pleasant camaraderie between them—grows steadily. This is not remarkable, since no one could be thrown familiarly with Kate without feeling her charm—the charm of a buoyant, sunny, thoroughly unselfish nature—and Fenwick is one of the rare characters that appear to most advantage under their own roof, and by their own hearthstone. "If ever two people were made for each other, these are the two!" Miss Brooke thinks, watching them with benignant satisfaction.

The end of this agreeable state of affairs comes unexpectedly to Kate. Strange as it may appear, she is the only person who has not seen what is imminent; and there is a quiet dignity about her which has kept any one from enlightening her. The surprise, therefore, might almost be described as a shock—and it occurs in this manner.

It has become an established thing that Fenwick and herself shall ride every day, and at the close of one of those Italian-like days, which come often in a Southern winter, they draw in their horses from a canter, on a point which commands a view of the city, wrapped in glorified mist, as the sun sets in a brilliant sky beyond it. Kate's cheeks are like roses, and her eyes like stars, and she draws a deep breath as she says:

"Ah, how delightful that was! What a pity that anything so pleasant should end! I hate to go home, do not you?"

"Just at present I feel as if I should not care how long this went on," Fenwick answers. "But presently we should grow cold, and tired, and hungry. Then home and dinner might not seem so objectionable. On the whole, it is not well for pleasures to last too long. They should leave a sweet flavor of recollection, not a bitter taste of weariness, behind them."

"Mine always do leave a sweet flavor of recollection," says Kate. "I have had a good deal of pleasure in my life—more than my share, it sometimes seems to me—and now I feel as if I were the heroine of a fairytale. Everybody is so wonderfully kind to me."

"Everybody deserves no credit for that," says her companion, smiling. "Some people are specially formed by Nature and gifted by God to win hearts—you are one of those people."

"Am I! How good of you to say so! But"—she shakes her head—"you are mistaken. People like me; but winning hearts is another thing. I could count on the fingers of one hand all that I possess."

"Count them, then," he says, looking amused.

"Well, there are the dear people at Fairfield's—but I suppose I ought not to count them. They have known me so long, and one is obliged to like people that one is associated with."

"Is that all you know of it? The reverse of the proposition is oftener true than not. Count the dear people at Fairfield's by all means. Their testimony to your engaging qualities is worth that of many strangers."

"But you know them all, at least you have heard their names often enough—uncle and Will and Sophy and Janet and the children, and I suppose Aunt Margaret. Then there is Mr. Proctor, and Miss Brooke—that is all."

"Are you sure it is all?"

He speaks so significantly that her cheek seems suddenly to have borrowed a crimson flush from the sunset. Her thoughts fly to Tarleton. "Who else should there be?" she asks in a low voice.

"Myself," he answers. "Do you not know it?"—as she starts. "I fancied you must. I have not tried to hide it from you. Why should I, when the first wish I have on earth is to win your heart?"

"But I have no heart to be won!" she cries in dismay. O Mr. Fenwick, how could you think of such a thing, when you knew—when you must have known—

"That you are attached to another man," he says, as she pauses. "Yes, I know—and, oddly enough, it is that which has made me think of you, has interested me in you, and led me to love you. If you had not been under this cloud when you first came, I should not have regarded you. But your cheerfulness in suffering, your resolute effort to banish despondency, your desire to forget, and your constancy in spite of that desire—these things taught me to know you. And"—his voice takes a very tender cadence here—"could any one know you and not love you, bonny Kate?"

"Oh, pray, pray don't talk so!" cries Kate, touched, overcome, melted, almost to the point of tears. "You make me feel a wretch!" she says. "How could I possibly foresee—what will Miss Brooke think of me?"

"Don't distress yourself!" says Fenwick. "I had no idea of starting you. Let us discuss it quietly, like a pair of reasonable friends, for we are that under all circumstances. In the first place, you must know that I heard of your attachment as soon as you came, and, as I have already said, it waked my sympathy and interest for you. I have also seen you struggle to overcome it. Must I understand by what you have just said that you have not succeeded in this?"

There is a minute's silence—a minute in which Kate looks in troubled silence before her. Then she says abruptly, "One must tell the truth at any cost. You cannot despise me more than I despise myself, but—but I have not succeeded. Do what I will," she says, clasping her hands together, "I cannot forget. As you have seen, I have made a fight, but what is the use of it? If I find a faded flower that brings back the past, I am as much a fool as ever."

"Don't call yourself opprobrious names," says Fenwick. "At least you are candid and loyal personified. But if you should throw away all your faded flowers—what then?"

"Then I should have memory left!" she says in a low tone. "But I don't encourage it, indeed I don't!" she cries earnestly, answering an expression that comes into his face. "If you could know how I have tried—"

"I know," he says, gently, as she pauses. "I understand thoroughly; and I only ask this: will you not try a little harder, for my sake? Can you not forget the past of which you speak, sufficiently to endeavor to love me? I will give you time—I will spare no effort—Kate, will you not try?"

"Oh, how can I?" says Kate. "No—I like you too well to give you false hope—it is impossible. If you knew how weak, how foolish I am, you would not ask it."

"Leave that to me. I do ask it, in spite of all that you can say of yourself. And, what is more, I will not take an answer now. You must wait—as I am willing to do—and consider. Trust me, forgetfulness will come to you after a while."

"But if it does not?" she says, in a troubled voice. "Then I should feel—"

"Nothing," he interrupts, "except that you trusted me—for I take the whole responsibility. I believe that in time I can win your love; and I certainly desire your happiness above all things. Will you not be guided by me? Will you not believe that I know what is best?"

"It is impossible," she says—and he sees that she is trembling from head to foot. "You do not know how impossible it is. If I could forget—but I cannot forget."

"You will forget in time," he answers. "The strong hours conquer all things, and the answer to most of life's riddles and perplexities is simply: Wait. And now let us have another canter."

When they reach home, Kate enters the familiar house feeling like a traitor. Can it be possible, that, in return for all Miss Brooke's kindness, she has brought even the shadow of pain upon that lady's dearly-loved nephew? "Oh, what a wretch I am!" she thinks, as she looks ruefully into the mirror while taking off

her hat, and marvels that there are no lines of care upon her face. "I make trouble everywhere I go! Mr. Fenwick said 'wait,' but, ah me, what is the good of waiting?"

It is with considerable perturbation that the self-convicted culprit takes her way down-stairs. "Miss Brooke ought to send me back to Fairfield's to-morrow," she says to herself, "and probably she will!"

No such intention is legible on Miss Brooke's face when she glances up with a smile, on Kate's entrance into the drawing-room. An elderly, bald-headed gentleman who wins Miss Lawrence's gratitude by his opportune appearance, is talking to her. He is introduced as "my old friend, Mr. Thorne," and while he looks at the young girl, Miss Brooke speaks in her usual manner:

"Herbert tells me that you have had a charming ride, bonny Kate. It has been a delightful afternoon. I hope you did not go so far that you tired yourself for to-night? You know you have an engagement for the theatre."

"I had forgotten it entirely," says Kate, "but I am not tired at all."

She does not add that she feels thoroughly indifferent to the dramatic entertainment, but after dinner makes her toilet and goes. Fenwick does not accompany them—since another escort claims Kate—and when they return, he has not yet come in.

"Go to bed," says Miss Brooke, touching the girl's cheek caressingly. "You look a trifle pale, I think. Good-night."

"Good-night, dear Miss Brooke!" says Kate, kissing her with a fondness that has in it a great deal of self-reproach. "But will you not come also?"

"No, I am not sleepy. I will sit here and read, and wait for Herbert. He will be in presently."

Kate quakes to hear this—but what can she say? Miss Brooke has a right to wait for Mr. Fenwick, and Mr. Fenwick has a right to confide the story of his declaration to Miss Brooke—if he likes to do so. She can prevent neither; so she goes dejectedly to her room, dismisses her maid as soon as possible, hears Fenwick come in, but does not hear Miss Brooke come up-stairs, and while still listening for this sound, falls happily asleep in the midst of her perplexity.

"Well, it will be all the same a hundred years hence!"

This is the philosophical reflection with which Kate fortifies her soul when the breakfast-bell rings the next morning, and she prepares to go down. There will be no Mr. Thorne—delightful in spite of baldness, solemnity and general prosiness—to stand as a friendly shield between herself and—she does not clearly know what. But the unknown is always invested with a peculiar terror, and the very fact of her not knowing adds greatly to her uneasiness. Her heart is beating with unusual quickness when she enters the cheerful breakfast-room, where Fenwick is reading items of news from the morning paper, and Miss Brooke—not at all alarming in appearance—is pouring out the coffee, and looking very handsome with a becoming morning cap crowning the soft puffs of her gray hair. She smiles and nods when Kate enters, and Fenwick lowers his newspaper to say good-morning and hope that she feels quite well.

She answers in the affirmative while she slips into the chair that Oscar draws back for her. After all, there is nothing terrible to fear. How could she fancy that there would be? With people like these, the wheels of life are so well oiled by courtesy, that no jar is to be dreaded. She applies herself to her breakfast, and presently, when the newspaper is laid aside, joins in the conversation with a sense of ease and relief.

Breakfast over, Mr. Fenwick takes his departure, but before doing so he asks Kate if she feels inclined to ride in the afternoon, as has been of late their custom. "Don't hesitate to say so, if you don't feel inclined," he adds, standing in the door, hat in hand.

He speaks and looks in such a kindly, not lover-like fashion, that all the uncomfortable thoughts with which she has been tormenting herself vanish like magic.

"Of course I feel inclined," she answers quickly. "It is such a lovely day, too lovely for anything but riding."

"At three o'clock, then, the horses will be at the door. Au revoir."

"Oh, how kind he is! how kind and considerate!" cries Kate, before the hall door has quite closed upon him. "Miss Brooke, dear Miss Brooke, has he told you? Have you heard what a wretch I am? Oh, what can I do?" She throws her arms about Miss Brooke as she speaks, her eyes look up tearful and imploring. Acting upon impulse, she does not pause to consider that five minutes earlier she would have shrunk from the idea of broaching the subject of her iniquity to Mr. Fenwick's injured aunt.

That lady smiles a little. "He has told me something—you may tell me the rest," she says. "I meant to ask you to do so. Come to my room, where we shall be safe from interruption. Nay, my child, don't be frightened! I have not the least intention of blaming you for anything."

Notwithstanding this assurance, Kate's courage is going out of the ends of her fingers as she goes up-stairs. "Oh, what a disagreeable world this is!" she is saying to herself. "Trouble, nothing but trouble; and people will fall in love and make things worse!"

"Why do you look so sad?" asks Miss Brooke, when they are seated opposite each other. "There is nothing to worry about. Herbert told me last night what he said and what you answered. I expected both. Men are so impetuous. If he had waited a little, your answer might have been different. But as it is, I am satisfied. Now that you know how much he loves you, my Kate, will you not try to love him? Not that I think," she adds with an air of pride, "that any one need try to love Herbert."

"He is thousand times too good for me," says Kate, "and that is what makes me feel so dreadfully! I admire and like him with all my heart, but—but I don't love him! O dear Miss Brooke"—she sinks down on the carpet and puts her head in Miss Brooke's lap—"don't you understand? It is weak and foolish of me, I know, but I can't, I can't forget—"

She does not say whom or what, but her companion understands her meaning. There is an instant's pause. Then Miss Brooke says gravely:

"It can't be possible, Kate, that you still have any entanglement with Frank Tarleton?"

"How can you ask me such a thing?" answers Kate. "No—I have none at all. I should despise myself if I had. If he were here this minute, I should tell him to go away; but with all this I have not been able to put him out of my heart, and so I was obliged to tell Mr. Fenwick that there was no hope for him."

"Now listen to me, my dear," says Miss Brooke. "This is nonsense, and I don't intend to let you make yourself miserable, not to speak of making Herbert miserable also, for a hundred Frank Tarletons. Looking at the matter in every point of view, it is your duty to forget him. He is ruined, to begin with; he is wild and reckless to a degree that would make it madness in any woman to marry him, a gambler, a duelist!"

"I don't think he is quite as bad as all that," interposes Kate; "but I have no idea of marrying him—not the least. How could I have, when it is not me that he was in love with, but Florida Vaughn?"

"Then show your pride and your courage by putting out of your mind and heart a man who was never worthy to have entered either!" says Miss Brooke resolutely. "Kate, you are not one of the girls who think it necessary to set themselves obstinately against the wishes of their friends. You would like to make those who love you—your uncle and myself, for instance—happy, would you not?"

"Ah, would I not?" cries Kate.

"Then be guided by me in this matter—by the counsel of one who might be your mother, my child; and who could hardly love you better, if she was. You may imagine, perhaps, that I am thinking of Herbert altogether. But it is not so, I am not even thinking of him principally. It is of you that I think—you, with your youth, your beauty, your impulsive heart. You need a home of your own, a position such as you would adorn, some one to rely upon who would be brave and honest and tender—and these things are not easy to find. I really do not know a single man to whom I would willingly trust you, except Herbert."

"He is everything that a man need be," says Kate, "and I like him, oh! very much, but—"

"But you fancy you do not love him. My dear, do not be impatient. You will love him after a while. If he is content with what you give him now—knowing that it will grow greater as time advances—why should not you be? If you have put the past behind you, what should you fear? Do you mean to wreck your life by clinging to the idea of a man you cannot marry?"

Kate looks up again with half-startled, half-bewildered eyes. What can she say? Why, indeed, should she hesitate? The past is left irrevocably behind—if Frank Tarleton had died, he could not be in every sense more dead to her than he is now—while she has not only her own future to consider, but also her kind, overburdened uncle, and the generous friend who is pleading her nephew's cause with so much tact and delicacy.

"You are very, very good," she says, with tears in her eyes. "I should be very ungrateful not to do anything for you—"

"We won't talk of gratitude, if you please. All I ask is that you will be patient with yourself, that you will give yourself time to forget, and that you will not refuse Herbert decidedly if he should speak to you again. Will you promise this?"

And Kate, before she knows clearly what she is about, has promised.

At three o'clock punctually, the horses are at the door, and with much trepidation Kate goes down to keep her engagement. It is likely that Fenwick perceives this trepidation—at least he exerts himself to set her at ease, and before very long succeeds. "Be patient," Miss Brooke has said to him, as she said to Kate. "The game is in your own hand—if you know how to wait. Do not press the matter—give her time. Now and then a woman may be found who is worth waiting for."

"I am not impatient—I have learned to know that time fights for him who knows how to wait," Fenwick answers.

He might also have added that he is not passionately in love. He is charmed, interested, sincerely attached to Kate, sincerely anxious to win her; but the feverish impetuosity of youth is over for him—never to return. In the present instance, he is the master, not the slave, of his passion, and this gives him a great advan-