

"How could I?" She goes forward and strokes the filly's silken neck, then, with her hand still on it, lifts her dark-lashed eyes to the face of the man standing beside her. "I hope she will be fortunate," the sweet, frank voice says, eagerly; "I hope she will sweep everything before her; but I fear there is no spell in the name to bring such a thing to pass."

"I would rather she failed under your name, than to succeed with any other," he answers, low and quickly.

Riding back toward Fairfields in the soft, purple dusk, Sophy says:

"What a fortunate thing it is, Kate, that Miss Vaughn has deferred her visit until the races are so near at hand! They may serve to entertain her. Did I tell you that mamma had a letter from Randal to-day, and he and Miss Vaughn, and Miss Vaughn's brother, will be here to-morrow."

"No, you did not tell me," says Kate, with interest. "So she is positively coming? How Miss Palmer's star will wane!—will it not? Have we told you about the distinguished visitor we are expecting?" she goes on, turning to Tarleton. "Of course you have heard of her—perhaps you may even know her—Miss Florida Vaughn."

"Florida Vaughn!" he repeats, and his tone expresses such intense amazement, together with something very like consternation, that Kate glances at him with surprise. "Are you in earnest? Do you really mean that she is coming to Fairfields?"

"I really mean it. You know her, then?" "Yes, I know her." Is it only Kate's fancy, or does his voice take a tone of bitterness as he utters those words? "In Heaven's name, what is the meaning of such a freak? How does she, of all people, chance to be coming here?"

"I do not know what is the meaning of the freak on her part, but, as far as we are concerned, she is coming because Aunt Margaret, at Randal's request, wrote and asked her to do so. Perhaps you have heard that Randal is desperately in love with her? She has treated him very badly; but he still dangles after her, until we have lost all patience with him, and think that he has very little sense or self-respect."

"I remember, now, that I have heard of him as one of her victims; but I paid little attention to the matter, and forgot it. No doubt he still dangles after her; he'll have uncommon pluck if he releases himself from Florida Vaughn, as long as she has a mind to keep him in her train."

"Is she so very fascinating?" "Fascinating!—yes," he answers, while his brows draw together, "but absolutely heartless, and all the more dangerous for that."

There is a moment's pause. Before them, in the still tinted west, shines out the delicate lustre of the evening star; behind, the full moon is rising majestically over the forest-clad hills; all around is spread the silent landscape, softly toned by twilight shadows. It is like a picture to Kate—a picture that she never forgets; yet she receives the impression half-unconsciously, for her thoughts are busy with Miss Vaughn; and when she presently speaks, it is to say:

"Can you imagine why she is coming? Is it at all probable that she thinks of marrying Randal?"

"Altogether improbable, I should say, and therefore I am at a loss to conceive what her motive for coming can be."

"It has puzzled us a good deal to imagine what it can be."

"I do not understand it at all," he says, speaking as if to himself, "but I wish—from my soul I wish—she were not coming."

CHAPTER XII.

"Within her face
Humility and dignity
Were met in a most sweet embrace."

"I believe I forgot to mention, my dear," says Mr. Lawrence at the breakfast table "that Miss Brooke will be here to-day."

"That is at least convenient as regards the carriage," says Mrs. Lawrence, in a tone which seems to imply that it is not convenient as regards anything else. "Randal has written that Miss Vaughn, her brother, and himself, will reach Arlington to-day; so they can all come to Fairfields together."

"I fear not, unless you detain the first comers in Arlington some time. The train on which Miss Brooke will come is a different train from that on which Randal and his friends expect to arrive, and is not due until nearly two hours later."

"Then the carriage can go for the first party, and one of the girls can take the pony-phaeton for Miss Brooke. I want some shopping done, anyway."

So it comes to pass that at four o'clock that afternoon, when the sun is sloping toward the west, and across the broad streets of Arlington the shadows of many trees stretch softly, Kate drives at a rattling pace down the smooth roadway over which these trees arch. She is a graceful, spirited figure, as she sits erect in the low phaeton, holding with firm, steady hands, the somewhat unruly little horse that draws it, and she has a bow and a smile for almost every one whom she meets. It has been well said, that the world is a mirror which gives us back the face we show to it; and Kate's sunshine is returned to her on all sides. Faces brighten for her that rarely brighten for any one else, and cordial lips smile even more cordially than their wont. Now and then she is stopped by some intimate acquaintance, but at the last person

who makes an effort of the kind she shakes her head merrily.

"Ever so sorry, but I can't stop a minute!" she cries. "I am going to the station to meet a visitor, and the train is nearly due."

She drives on rapidly, and reaches the station with just five minutes to spare.

"Now, Ben," she says to the small groom—a half-grown mulatto boy—who is seated in the rumble, "I wonder if I can trust you to hold Modoc when the train comes? He always pretends to be dreadfully frightened, and tries to run away; but you must not let him go. I would stay to hold him myself, only I have to meet the lady.—Oh, Mr. Tarleton! is this you?"

A bright blush and brighter smile accompany these words, for Tarleton's appearance is altogether unexpected, as he makes his way through the waiting groups on the platform, and comes up to the side of the phaeton.

"It is I, 'if I be I, as I do think I be,'" he replies. "Can I be of any service? Have you, like myself, come to meet a friend?"

"Yes; I have come to meet Miss Brooke. Do you know her? You seem to know everybody."

"Do you mean Miss Anastasia Brooke? Yes, I know her very well, and I should have lost my heart to her long ago but for a slight discrepancy in age, and a few other things. I am glad you have come to meet her. I was afraid, when I saw you, that you had come for Miss Vaughn."

"That would be quite unnecessary, since Miss Vaughn has reached Fairfields by this time. She arrived on the other train—two hours ago."

The shadow which falls over his face at this news is unmistakable evidence of what he feels. "I hoped she might change her mind at the last moment," he says. "She is capricious as the wind."

"Why are you so averse to seeing her?" asks Kate, looking at him curiously. "Do you really dislike her?"

Before he can answer this question, there is a distant rumble which tells of the approach of the train; and Modoc, pricking up his ears, at once begins to move uneasily.

"Oh, never mind! I can manage him," says Kate, as Tarleton suggests the expediency of her alighting. "I will hold him if you will be kind enough to meet Miss Brooke and bring her here. I do not know her at all."

"I will meet her with pleasure; but I do not like to leave you with that horse."

"Modoc and I know each other," says Kate, wrapping the reins round her hands, and holding Modoc, despite his plunging, as the train comes with a wild howl and a thunderous rush. "Pray go!" she adds, nodding to Tarleton. "Someone must meet Miss Brooke."

Thus adjured, and seeing that she is perfectly capable of managing the horse, Tarleton goes, and within a few minutes—by the time Modoc is quieted and Kate is able to leave the phaeton—returns with a lady on his arm, her maid following with satchels and shawls. A woman of not more than fifty, with soft gray puffs of hair framing a serene, handsome face, out of which bright, dark eyes look—this is Miss Brooke. When she meets Kate, she holds out her hand with a smile such as the Irish call "the sunshine of the heart."

"So glad to know you, my dear!" she says. "I can't feel that we are strangers at all, for you are Allan's daughter. I see that in your face."

"Do you, indeed?" cries Kate. "Ah, I am so happy to hear you say so! I don't want to look like anybody but my dear father. And you were his friend, too, then?"

His friend, his comrade, his counsellor, and his adorer, all in one, says Miss Brooke, smiling. "Let me kiss you, my dear, for his sake, as I know that, before long, I shall kiss you for your own. There! now that is settled, and we are friends."

"How kind you are!" says Kate; "and how glad I am that it was I who came to meet you! Aunt Margaret thought Sophy or Janet ought to come; but they were both detained at the last minute, so I was sent. Now, Mr. Tarleton!"—suddenly remembering that he is standing by—"I must not keep you longer. If you will put Miss Brooke in the phaeton, I will let you go and find your friend."

"My friend can take care of himself," says Tarleton, with the most evidently honest indifference concerning that personage's fate or whereabouts. "You must let me be of use a little further. Do you propose to take Miss Brooke's trunks on that immense carriage?"

Kate laughs, and points to a servant who at that moment comes forward, hat in hand.

"Here is Milton, who will take charge of them," she says, "and also of Miss Brooke's maid. He has the wagon here."

"Then I have no excuse for detaining you any longer," says Tarleton, assisting them into the phaeton. "I shall have the pleasure of seeing you very soon."

As he lifts his hat and steps back, Kate lets Modoc go, and the station platform, the puffing engine and long trains of cars, are quickly left behind.

It is little to say that, by the time they have traversed the seven miles that lie between Arlington and Fairfields, Miss Brooke has won the enthusiastic liking of her young companion. She is a woman who, during her whole life, has been accustomed to win liking from all who came in contact with her—all save the few people whom she dislikes; and it is only necessary to know her to discover the cause of this.

When good sense and good temper are joined to generosity and courtesy, there are few persons able to resist the combination, even when it is not supported by such high social position and large fortune as she possesses.

During the drive their conversation has ranged over many topics, and the bright, dark eyes of the elder woman grow momentarily kinder as they turn to the sparkling face of the younger. But when they enter the gate of Fairfields, a shade of melancholy comes over her face, and in her eyes an expression of sadness gathers as they rest on the old house, standing in dignified state amid its many-tinted trees.

"How little it has changed!" she says, with a sigh. "Yet it is twenty years since I saw it last. Can you realize that, my dear? It seems a very short time to me, but it has been long enough to bring a new generation on the stage."

"But we don't monopolize it," says Kate. "On the contrary, we feel that we are very newcomers."

As they approach the house, Mr. Lawrence appears on the piazza, and, while he stands at the head of the steps with the rays of the sinking sun streaming on his erect figure and uncovered head, Miss Brooke looks at him with the same sadness in her glance.

"Men do not wear as well as houses," she says; "and yet he has worn better than most. Well, my friend, here I am, you see!" she says, extending her hand to him, as Kate with a sweeping curve draws the phaeton up.

He clasps it with a warmth rare even in one so uniformly genial and hospitable as himself. Nor is Mrs. Lawrence, who now makes her appearance, less cordial in her welcome. She leads Miss Brooke into the house, while Kate, flying away to her own quarters, bursts in upon Sophy and Janet like a whirlwind.

"Girls," she cries, breathlessly, "I am in love!—deeply in love! Miss Brooke is charming beyond expression! She looks like a benevolent queen-dowager, and she talks—oh, she talks delightfully! How was such a woman ever allowed to become an old maid? If I were a man, I would even yet 'build me a willow cabin at her gate,' and make her marry me."

"Much you know what you would do if you were a man!" says Janet, scornfully. "Instead of appreciating a woman of sense, like Miss Brooke, no doubt you would follow in Randal's steps, and make a fool of yourself about the flesh-and-blood beauty who has arrived here since you have been gone."

"Oh, do tell me about her!" cries Kate, with vivid interest. "Is she very beautiful?"

"She is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen!" says Sophy. "I do not wonder that she turns men's heads. I am sure I should fall in love with her at once."

"I should not," says Janet. "If I were a man! I would not put my heart down 'in the way of a fair woman's foot'—and that is all that would come of falling in love with Miss Vaughn. I do not like her nose! Somebody has said that the aquiline bend is always hard and cruel in a woman—and I believe it is."

"Mr. Tarleton says that she has no heart," observes Kate, unguardedly.

"So he tried to find it, did he?" asks Sophy. "I don't think so," replies Kate, quickly. "He did not speak as if he liked her at all."

"A man never likes a woman who has had the bad taste not to like him," says Janet, who has a habit of talking as if she were three-score, and possessed an exhaustive knowledge of the vanities and follies of mankind.

An hour later, Kate having completed her toilet in advance of her cousins, takes her way down stairs and enters the drawing-room, where, as yet, twilight reigns undisturbed, save by the red glow of the fire which burns on the hearth, for the October evenings have already a crisp chill.

Moving across the floor with a step as light as her heart, she sits down to the open piano, and, touching the keys softly, begins to sing. One of the tender old ballads which she loves rises to her lips, but before she has gone through a single verse her tones cease suddenly, for she hears a familiar voice in the hall say:

"Come into the drawing-room. Somebody is down, for I hear the piano."

"Randal!—and Mr. Vaughn, no doubt!" she says to herself, rising with an impulse of flight. Even if flight were not undignified, however, she has not time for it, since the next moment two masculine figures enter and advance toward where she stands in the obscurity—a graceful, slender presence, with the fitful fire-gleams wavering over her.

"It is Kate, is it not?" says Randal, putting out his hand. "I thought I knew your voice. Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Vaughn."

Kate and the gentleman before her bow, while Randal walks across the room and rings the bell.

"Why are you in the dusk, Kate?" he goes on. "I can't understand the fancy some people have for twilight. I always want to see what I am about."

"There are very agreeable associations connected with twilight," says Mr. Vaughn, in a well-trained, indolent voice. "I rather like it—especially with music. I hope" (to Kate) "you will continue singing. I shall be sorry if you let us interrupt you."

"I was only amusing myself," she answers; "you do not interrupt me." To herself she adds: "I shall not like him; but then it followed, of course, that I could not like one of Randal's friends!"

Before anything else can be said, a servant enters with lights, and these two people, the

threads of whose lives are destined to cross in more than one fashion, look at each other for the first time.

What Mr. Vaughn sees, we know. What Kate sees is a tall, distinguished-looking man, with a pale complexion, aquiline features, cold and rather shallow eyes, silken-brown hair, and whiskers (also brown) so long that they nearly touch his shoulders.

He is a man whose countenance seldom betrays anything he may be thinking or feeling; but there are one or two signs significant of approval or disapproval, which Randal knows, and by which he sees at present that even this most fastidious gentleman is pleased and surprised by the appearance of the girl before him. His quick yet quiet glance dwells on her for a moment in keen scrutiny, then he says, with what for him is marked emphasis:

"I am exceedingly happy to have the pleasure of seeing and knowing you; for I feel that I have a claim to your acquaintance, unless you have an objection to discovering new relations."

Kate looks at him a little doubtfully. "I do not know whether I have an objection or not," she answers, "since I have never had the gratification—shall I say?—of discovering any."

"Let us hope that you will count it a gratification," he says, "for the moment of novel experience has come. Allow me to present myself to you as a cousin, and to hope that we may see a great deal of each other in the future."

Ignoring the hand which he extends, Kate regards him with a gaze in which astonishment is largely mingled with incredulity.

"You must be mistaken," she says. "I do not think it possible that we are cousins; at least, I can't imagine how it is possible."

"Let me make it clear," he responds, with a smile. "You are probably not much of a genealogist—your people seldom are; but you are, of course, aware that your mother was a Miss Ashton. So was my mother, and they were cousins—second cousins. This gives me the happiness of being your third cousin; and, since my name is Ashton Vaughn, I hope you are sufficiently convinced to recognize me as a kinsman."

His manner is everything that it should be, and he is certainly a kinsman whom most people would be very willing to recognize—a man in whose veins it is evident that blue blood flows, and whose breeding is of the highest order; but Kate, with an instinct she hardly understands, still feels an odd reluctance to put her hand in the one which he offers. She does so, however, courteously, if not cordially.

"No doubt you are right," she says. "I am a very poor genealogist, and I have never had an opportunity to know anything of my mother's relatives."

"There are not many of us to know," replied Mr. Vaughn, "and a third cousin is a relation that may be conveniently near, or far, as one chooses to make it. I confess that I am ambitious of being admitted to all the rights and privileges of near relationship; but, if you choose to set me at a distance, I can only bow in resignation."

"I am afraid you think I am not very gracious," she says, with a slight blush; "but as you said a moment ago, this is a novel experience to me. You are the first Ashton whom I have ever seen."

"Except the one whom you see in your mirror," he says. "I must not suffer you to forget that you are as much an Ashton as I am."

Half unconsciously she lifts her head proudly. "Everybody who knows me tells me that I am a Lawrence—altogether a Lawrence," she says. "I am glad of it. If I am half Ashton in blood, I am all Lawrence in heart."

"Kate!" says Randal, in a half-shocked, half-warning tone; but Mr. Vaughn laughs. The piquancy of this outspoken dislike pleases him, since he entertains no doubt whatever of his power to change it.

"But we—I speak as an Ashton—do not mean to be altogether banished from such a fair territory as your heart must be," he says. "Surely you have not barred the door against us?"

"It has not been worth while to do so," she answers carelessly. "No one of the name has ever knocked at it. If I had known my mother, I should probably feel differently," she adds, after a moment's pause; "but I never knew her."

"Nor have you ever seen your uncle, Mr. Edward Ashton, I believe?"

"No," she replies. "I have never seen him. I trust that I never shall see him."

"Kate," says Randal, breaking in again, "candour may be a very beautiful virtue, but allow me to suggest that an excess of it has its drawbacks."

"There can be no possible drawback to my candour with regard to Mr. Ashton," says Kate.

She turns as she speaks, and is in the act of crossing the room, when there is a step on the staircase, a rustle of sweeping silk over the hall, and through the open door a radiant presence enters.

CHAPTER XIII.

"A worthless woman! Mere cold clay,
As all false things are! but so fair,
She takes the breath of men away
Who gaze upon her unaware."

While Randal advances eagerly, Kate pauses, overwhelmed with admiration, for in all her life she has never before seen so beautiful a woman. Nor is such a woman often to be seen. In her loveliness there is not one ray of spiritual grace;