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KATE ASHWOOD.

CHAPTER II.

"If this austere incoercible life
Change not your offer made in heat of blood—
If frosts and fasts, hard lodging and thin weeds,
Nip not the gaudy blossoms of your love,
But that it bear this trial and last love,
Then at the expiration of the year
Come challenge me."

Love's Labour's Lost.

Tuesday morning was bright and sunny; but that peculiar brilliancy which generally terminates in heavy rains. The evening before had been gray and threatening, and we all know the old adage,

"The evening gray and the morning red
Send the travellers wet to bed."

Many of the young people had spent the greater part of the morning in promenades to and fro the window, and many and various were the prophecies concerning the weather, on the proper behaviour of which depends the enjoyment of picnics.

At the appointed hour the party from Warrentown set off for the ruins. One of the number had looked anxiously forward to this day, and her heart beat quickly and her cheek flushed as the carriage drove away. Half an hour brought the Ashwoods to the scene of gaiety, where a number of the guests had already assembled, and one moment after Fitz-James walked up to the carriage and handed the ladies out. The picnic was like most entertainments of the kind. Every one contributed something to the feast; some brought hams, others chickens; while more, thinking the sweets of life preferable, brought baskets full of tarts, custards, and creams. The jovial brought champagne, and the serious paterfamilias more sober slurry; but Aunt Sarah's contributions far outweighed all the others, and she, thoughtful soul, had not forgotten baskets of provisions to be divided among the domestics—coachmen and footmen, a promiscuous throng, who pitched their camp at some distance from their masters. The dinner was spread in the roofless chapel of the abbey, as it offered many advantages. The tombs were converted into impromptu tables and chairs, and spread over with tablecloths, glasses, bottles, provisions, &c. The altar was transformed into a sideboard, and the various niches, where formerly stood figures of saints, were used as receptacles for cakes, fruits, &c.

Aunt Sarah had protested vehemently against such a misapplication of a sacred place; her original intention was to have applied the refectory to its ancient use; but her objections were overruled, and the general hilarity was not in the least interfered with the mortuary reminiscences around.

The dinner had not long been commenced when the rain began to pour in torrents. A rush for umbrellas ensued; and the lovely pink-and-white bonnets—for turban and pork-pie hats were then unknown—were soon hidden from sight. The dinner was indeed enjoyment under difficulties. The umbrellas dripped here and there, and the repast was greatly spoiled. Ducks that had been forced to swim in sauce now had enough of their favorite element showering upon them. Creams that had been frozen, and kept in that condition with an infinity of trouble, now turned again into liquids. The whole scene in a few moments was changed. Nothing was observable but a tent of umbrellas. The dinner, such as it became, was, however, concluded, and the ladies and gentlemen broke into groups as best suited themselves, and endeavored to make temporary shelter for their protection from the rains. After an hour or more some ventured out, closely enveloped in waterproofs.

Kate and Fitz-James were among the first to do so; they were so absorbed in each other as to be totally indifferent to wet grass and a damp atmosphere.

Long and earnest was the conversation between them. Fitz-James was describing in eloquent terms the beauties of his own home—situated as it was in a deep ravine between two mountains—and he succeeded in exciting Kate's interest in the place. Fitz-James had been intensely studying Kate all the day, and he could no longer doubt that she cared for him.

"Miss Ashwood—Kate?" at last he exclaimed, "say but one word and the place is yours. I have been longing for this opportunity of telling you of my ardent affection for you. Don't refuse this earnest appeal, or I shall be ever miserable." His language became more and more impassioned, as he thought she was turning from him. "Am I, then, mistaken at last?" burst forth from his lips; "have I ventured too far?" He paused, disappointed, distressed.

She looked up in his face; and her bright smile in a moment dispelled his doubts. She murmured, "Yes."

A delightful hour followed; but we will leave all that to the imagination of the readers. Most of us have experienced such hours in our lives; and though they may have been followed by cold-

ness, indifference, nay, even treachery, still they are infallibly fixed on the memory in characters never to be effaced.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Ashwood was wondering what could have become of Kate; and, on inquiry, discovered that she and Fitz-James had been seen by some of the party starting off for a walk. This naturally drew attention to the fact that Fitz-James and Kate Ashwood had been much together of late. The day was drawing to a close, and carriages were getting ready to transport the company to the Hermitage, where the evening was to be spent in dancing. At the last moment Kate and her lover appeared. Mrs. Ashwood was becoming much excited, and felt highly gratified at observing Kate and Fitz-James so much together. Kate took the first opportunity of telling her mother all that had occurred; and there were few happier matrons at the dance that evening; and certainly no maiden with a lighter heart than Kate. She and Fitz-James danced, walked, and sat together, and danced again; in short, passed the evening as lovers immemorial have been accustomed. Mrs. Ashwood's face beamed with smiles; and on Kate's countenance there was a look of conscious inward joy and content. That day her lot in life was settled, and that lot she esteemed a happy one, since it was to be identical with Fitz-James in weal or woe. Two short bright weeks followed. Kate and her lover met every day, and their measure of happiness seemed complete; and Kate in her inmost soul began to doubt the reality of sayings she had often heard, that this is a world of sorrow, that suffering is our lot here below; and she began to think that she was a favored being, exempt from this common fate of mortals. But there was a deep dark cloud under all this sunshine; the silver lining had been uppermost; and Kate Ashwood was destined to shed many and bitter tears, and experience sad, sad hours, ere she again saw one ray of the sunshine which had before seemed to dazzle her with its brilliancy.

While every thing looked promising, Kate and Fitz-James living in each other's smiles, and friends sympathizing, and Aunt Sarah doing her utmost to promote the happiness of all, sorrow and a grief were, like conspirators, working a mine which was to explode these bright visions of happiness into naught. Mr. Siffit, the attorney, whose firm had for generations arranged the matrimonial affairs, wills, and bequests, &c., in the Ashwood family, and without whom no marriage, coming of age, or death took place, was destined to throw a gloom over these prospects. The Ashwoods had never doubted Fitz-James's wealth, and were thunderstruck when one day, after a long conversation between O'Brien and Mr. Siffit, the latter informed the Ashwood family that three hundred pounds a year was all that Mr. O'Brien had to settle. Kate owned ten thousand pounds, left her by an aunt; and Mr. Siffit gave it as his opinion that the remainder of the O'Brien property was no *quid pro quo* for Kate's fortune, and that such being the case, the match should in his opinion be broken off. His legal conception did not recognize such a thing as love. Mr. Siffit's business was to do the best for his clients; as to hearts, what were they to him? They were no affair of his. This indelible hereby snoweth, not that two young hearts love each other with a devoted affection, but that Fitz-James O'Brien has so much to settle on Kate Ashwood, about to become his wife; and in the present instance Fitz-James O'Brien not having the so much to settle, Kate Ashwood should not become his wife.

"Marriage is a subject of more worth
To be dealt with by attorneyship."

So wrote the good poet; so thought Kate and Fitz-James.

Mr. Ashwood felt himself in a very unpleasant situation. His daughter was engaged by his permission to Mr. O'Brien; how break his solemn promise without compromising his honor? He thought again and again over the matter; had a long conversation with Kate, the drift of which was that he expected her to do her duty by her family, and give up Fitz-James. The poor girl expostulated, implored, besought, all in vain.—Mr. Ashwood remained firm in his determination never to hear another word of Fitz-James.—Kate was long enough acquainted with her father to be aware that further argument was useless.

Mr. Ashwood had had a long battle with himself that morning. Honor and affection for his daughter both prompted him to keep the engagement by which he was bound; but he was a proud man; and the idea that his daughter should marry on such small means was more than he could bear. He felt he was in the wrong; and that feeling only served to render him irritable when opposed or contradicted. He was very uncomfortable as to how he should inform Fitz-James of the determination he had made. It is a very true saying, that we find it much harder to forgive those whom we have injured than those who have done us harm; and Mr.

Ashwood felt at this moment that he hated Fitz-James O'Brien. He requested an interview with him; and after a great deal of circumlocution at last informed him bluntly the marriage must be broken off. Fitz-James was naturally hasty; and Mr. Ashwood, who was rather cowardly, was not prepared for the outburst of wrath that followed this announcement. He accused Mr. Ashwood of acting basely, infamously, treacherously, dishonorably. Every epithet in the vocabulary was made use of; and when he had exhausted them he left him, and hastened with rapid strides to the garden where he had left Kate, and poured forth his griefs in her sympathizing ear. He implored her to be his by all the love she had ever promised him; to leave all others—father, mother, sisters, brothers—and remain with him.

"Come," he said, "delay not; you are bound to me more than any person living; and will you too prove unfaithful? Kate, you must and will accompany me. Hasten at once. Does filial duty keep you back? why should it? Your father himself ratified your promise to me."

He paused and looked in her face for acquiescence; but his search was vain.

Kate replied, calmly and resolutely, "No, Fitz-James; much as I love you—and God knows the sincerity of my affection—I will not nor cannot do as you propose. At present, dearest, our marriage seems hopeless; but take courage. If you will be constant to me, you need not fear my determination. Marry without my father's consent I cannot, nor will not; out trust me. No effort will be spared to induce my father to relent. It may be a long wait, and will require much patience. Is your affection strong enough for this?"

"Indeed, Kate, it is; but must I remain contented with such an answer? Is this to be the end of my hopes and wishes? Kate, your father is a tyrant. What right has he to interfere with our happiness! what power has God given him to come between you and me in this manner?"

"Hush," interposed Kate; "no more of this conversation. Remember he is my father; and let me implore you to go. You will be recollected by me every day of my life; but for the present it is best we should separate; this is only a prolongation of agony."

"Kate, then good-by!" he exclaimed, taking her hand, and pressing it vehemently, "God bless you, my darling!"

He seized her slight trembling figure, and pressing his lips on her forehead in one long last kiss, departed. When Kate recovered courage again to look around her, he was gone. What a blank life then was for her. She continued her daily occupations as she had formerly done; but her songs were spiritless, her drawings without animation. She pined; but so gently and uncomplainingly that few observed the change, till by degrees the hollow cheek and hot feverish hand gave warning that the constant depression was more than her health could bear.

Meanwhile Fitz-James returned to Ireland.—His own sunny, beautiful Shanaghah offered but few attractions to him now. He shut himself up there, and saw no one. His friends and tenants remarked the awful change that had taken place in his appearance; he that was the life and soul of every entertainment now shunned the sight of his fellow-man. A complete dejection of spirit seemed to have taken possession of him; and as the winter came on the change became more apparent. He who formerly prided himself on being the first in every hunt, now heeded not hunts or horses. Foxes might be killed, new covers made; but what mattered they to him? He had pictured to himself that Kate would be beside him enjoying all these; and as she was not there, his zest was gone.

CHAPTER III.

"My noble father,

I do perceive here a divided duty;
To you I am bound for life and education;
My life and education both do learn me
How to respect you; you are the lord of duty;
I am hitherto your daughter; but here's my husband;
And so much duty as my mother show'd
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor my lord."

Othello.

Kate at length became so nervous, and altogether unwell, that her parents considered it would be absolutely necessary for her to have change of scene. It was therefore arranged that she, her father, and Fanny should with Charles—Kate's eldest brother—take a little trip to France for a short time. She, poor thing, cared not where she went, but agreed to any plan her family proposed.

Neither of the girls had ever been abroad; and the idea of seeing Paris gave Fanny immense pleasure. And how can we see Paris for the first time and not feel delighted with its beauty, the gaiety of the inhabitants, the sights innumerable, the picture-galleries, and the thousandfold

attractions of the gayest and brightest capital in the world. Every one had such an air of enjoyment, the 'fetes' were so brilliant, that Kate by degrees was obliged to join in the general amusement. To describe the different places they visited would be indeed useless, as Paris is as well known to Englishmen as their own metropolis. They inspected numbers of the churches, and were greatly struck by the fact that they are always open on the Continent. Our friends knew little of Catholic observances; and they remarked that numbers of people used to drop in at different hours of the day to pass a few moments in silent prayer. Here and there might be seen a basket-woman, her wares lying beside her as she offered up her devotions before the shrine of some saint. Again might be observed the *bouquetiere*, whose fragrant burden struck the eye, as well as attracting attention from the delightful odour. The mother brought her little ones, and taught them under that sacred roof to hsp their daily prayers. The blind beggar and luxuriously-dressed lady each offered up their petitions before the throne of the Most High.—And sometimes even the dandy—the fashionable swell—the man of the world—might be seen lingering within the sacred temple; and remembrances of days gone by would recur when he knelt beneath that hallowed roof and prayed; and the words he had then uttered might hover on his lips and fashion themselves anew into prayers. The young maiden just on the threshold of life, as yet pure and unspotted by the world, is there, meditating on the contrast this quiet spot presents to the bustle around her; and he essays in vain to reconcile the opposite maxims of the world and the Gospel.

Our travellers went frequently to the theatres and were much interested and amused by all they witnessed. But though Kate would sometimes be diverted by the interest she took in the various places she saw, she felt she would have given them all for one momentary sight of her lover. Of all her family, Kate loved Charles the most. He was always so kind, thoughtful, and affectionate. One evening, on his return from the theatre, he found Kate, who had waited to receive him, lying asleep in an arm-chair; traces of tears were on her cheeks, her eyelids were swollen, and there was a dark look under her eyes. A slip of paper lay on her knee; it was quite moistened with her tears; the pencil with which she had been writing, had fallen on the ground beside her. He picked up the paper and found the following:

"August 30th was the happiest day of my life. Oh, the moment when Fitz-James stood beside me and asked me to be his!—a moment never, never to be forgotten. Oh, how I love him!—God only knows the extent of my affection.—The sound of his footsteps was music in my ears; how his voice, the touch of his hand, thrilled my inmost soul! Is life always to be this wretched burden to me? O God, give me patience for such a trial! Life that was given us as a blessing is now become the greatest of evils. Could I only die!"

Here the writing became so indistinct that he could decipher no further.

Charles really loved Kate tenderly. They had, as children, often spent months together at the Hermitage with their grandmother, while their father and mother lived in London; and having no children of the same age with them, they relied on each other solely for amusement.

Charles was much affected on reading this simple effusion, in which so much was conveyed in a few words. He read and re-read it, and drawing himself up in a very determined manner, he exclaimed:

"This marriage must and shall take place!—The poor girl must not be heartbroken."

He said this last sentence so vehemently, that Kate awoke, and instinctively felt for the piece of paper. She looked up and saw Charles's eyes fixed on her with an expression of intense compassion.

"Oh, Charles," she said, as she perceived the paper in his hand, "did you read that?"

"Yes, Kate," he replied; "and I am determined that your case shall again be represented to my father. Why did you not tell me your great anxiety on the subject? surely you know well I would have moved heaven and earth to obtain his consent."

Kate's tears began to flow afresh; she sobbed violently and convulsively; thanked him again and again for the sympathy he had shown; and confessed that her heart was breaking.—Charles bade her cheer up, and assured her of his co-operation and support.

She felt now more happy than she had done for a long time; his words reassured her; and next morning she came down to breakfast with a smile on her lips such as she had not worn for weeks. How sweet is sympathy in affliction!

Charles used often to take Kate long walks in Paris and its vicinity. They often went to

the Bois de Boulogne, and were much struck with appearance of life and gaiety it presented. The incessant roll of carriages filled with well-dressed ladies and children fatigued the sight, and the stranger turns with a feeling of relief to even such artificial glimpses of nature as this suburb presents. The sound of rushing waters form an agreeable contrast to the ever-continuous hum of human voices, and for a moment conveys the idea of being far from the din of a large city.

Mr. Ashwood had a few acquaintances in Paris whom he had known many years before, which enabled his family to enjoy a little of Parisian society; but, unfortunately, Kate's health, which had much improved on first coming to Paris, began to suffer. The doctor declared that Paris air did not suit mademoiselle; it was necessary that she should go into the country for some weeks. Little did he know what was passing beneath. He could not minister to a mind diseased. The poor man advised as far as his lights would permit. He was not told Kate was pining with the grief which was hidden at her heart, and that town and country were all the same to her. As the doctor was so urgent on the necessity of leaving Paris, all agreed to undertake an excursion to the country; and it was with much pleasure that they availed themselves of an invitation previously given them by M. and Madame de Chateaubourg, to spend some time at their residence in Picardy.

Grande Foret was a large antique building with a very high roof, a large courtyard, entered by a gateway which led under the chateau: there were high towers on either side of the main building; extensive woods were at the rear of the chateau; there were large gardens and green houses; and very good pheasant-shooting in the demesne, where Mr. Ashwood and Charles had some agreeable days' sport.

Madame de Chateaubourg was an amiable elegant creature. Her father was a very rich Englishman, and she had married Monsieur de Chateaubourg in very early life. She had two young children whom she idolised, and on whom she concentrated, I may say, her whole affections. M. de Chateaubourg neglected her very much. The Jockey Club absorbed much more of his attention and time than did poor madame, who, in consequence, abhorred Paris. In the country, *faute de mieux*, monsieur sometimes would take pleasure in her society; and great was her delight when he occasionally asked her to drive or walk with him. She longed to possess his affection and regard; but having made many fruitless efforts to wean him from the course of chilling indifference which he pursued towards her, and to inspire him with a better and holier feeling of love and respect, she at last shut herself up as much as possible remote from the world and its gaieties; and in the enjoyment her children gave her, she tried as much as possible to forget her other sorrows. She also took much pleasure in Grande Foret. She was passionately fond of flowers, and she had many opportunities of indulging her favorite taste.

There were some very nice people in the neighboring chateau, and Kate and her sister spent many pleasant hours in visiting these friends of Madame Chateaubourg. Sometimes the evenings would terminate with music, dancing, and charades.

From the manner in which the French nation is organized, country gentlemen have not, as with us, multitudinous affairs to attend to appertaining to country matters; and the Ashwoods were much struck with the melancholy fact that highly-educated, highly-gifted, well-informed men would, *faute de mieux*, sit down to cards half the day long.

Madame de Chateaubourg was very fond of English literature. She naturally clung to any thing English; and she often asked Kate to read to her while she worked. One day as Kate was reading *Romeo and Juliet*, madame was struck with the enthusiastic manner in which she entered into the love there expressed, and she became much excited as she read on. She read with peculiar emphasis:

"*Juliet*. I am too fond,
And therefore thou mayest think my 'naïveur' light;
But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
Than those that have more cunning to be strange.
I should have been more strange, I must confess,
But that thou over-hearest; ere I was aware,
My love's true passion: therefore pardon me,
And don't impute this yielding to light love,
Which the dark night hath so discovered."

"*Romeo*. Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear,
That tips with silver all those fruit-tree tops—
Juliet. Oh, swear not by the moon, th' inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in its circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable."

"*Romeo*. What shall I swear by?
Juliet. Do not swear at all;
Or, if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,
Which is the god of my idolatry,
And I'll believe thee."

And again, in another part of the dialogue:—"And all my fortune at thy foot I'll lay,
And follow thee, my lord, throughout the world."