

"Yes, somebody has," answers Kate; "Janet is bringing it. We can have the fire ready by the time it gets here."

"But I have not seen the view," says Tarleton, who has, meanwhile, fastened the horses and returned to her side. "Don't you mean to show it to me?"

"Not just yet," she answers. "The sun would be injurious to your complexion. Wait a little later, till the shadows begin to lengthen over the valley; the view will be lovelier then. Now go, and find a pair of auditors for the fire."

Every one, glad of something definite to do, falls merrily to work; and when the Fairfields party arrive on the scene, the fire is ready for the kettle, which Jane is instantly called upon to produce. It is filled with water at the spring, and hung on two sticks, in gypsy fashion, over the bright blaze.

This arduous task ended, the unanimous opinion of the company is, that enough has been done for a time.

"Nobody wants supper just yet," says Will. "Let us go and admire the view." Miss Palmer, has any one pointed out to you the different places of note that can be seen?"

"Mr. Norton tried to point them out to me," replies Miss Palmer; "but the sun dazzled my eyes so that I could not distinguish a great deal."

"Come, then, and I'll show them all to you," says Will. "I know the name of everything, from the farthest mountain peak to the court-house in Arlington."

"I shall be delighted," says Miss Palmer, in a tone more expressive of resignation than delight.

Kate watches her with a smile, as she accompanies Will to the usual place of lookout—a jutting point of rock at the summit of the cliff. "Why cannot that girl say honestly that she does not care a fig for views?" she is thinking, when Tarleton's voice unexpectedly speaks again, close to her side:

"Now may I claim your promise?" he asks. "The sun is very low, and I have forgotten the view nearly as completely as I forgot the road."

"Then, if you could forget it, you don't deserve to have it showed to you again," she says. "I think your interest must be equal to that of Miss Palmer, who has just accompanied Will with so much eagerness. Suppose you follow them?"

"So far from desiring to follow them," he replies, "I was about to ask if there is no other point to which we can go? I cannot enjoy anything when I am one of a mob."

"A complimentary mode of designating our party," says Kate. "But if you want uninterrupted solitude in which to indulge deep emotions, or anything of that kind, how would the summit of the Pinnacle answer?"

She nods, as she speaks, toward a mass of immense, irregular rocks, piled one upon another to the height of fully eighty feet, the topmost one standing on end, obelisk fashion, and looking as if nothing less active than a squirrel could scale it.

"It will answer admirably," he replies, taking her words for a jest, "if you will go with me. I don't care for absolute solitude."

"Very well," she says, as if he had proposed the most ordinary feat. "I have not been on the Pinnacle for two years, but I dare say I can manage to climb it. What one has done once, one ought to be able to do again. But are you sure your head is steady? The last man whom I took up there complained so dreadfully of giddiness, that I was glad to get him down safely to the ground again."

"My head is steady as the Pinnacle itself," Tarleton answers, "but I did not imagine you were in earnest. It strikes me it is hardly safe for you to climb those rocks."

"Your prudent thought comes too late," she replies. "I have climbed them several times, and the ascent is not half so difficult as it appears, while the view is superb; one sees all around, without any obstructions. If you care to try it, come!"

She moves away among the picturesque masses of gray rock, and he quickly follows her. "Now," says Kate, exultantly, "did I not tell you that the view would be superb?"

These are the first words which she utters, after they have, with great difficulty and exertions, gained the summit of the Pinnacle. The top of the rock on which they stand would not prove a desirable perch to any one inclined to giddiness; but these two feel that it is delightful to be exalted so high above the moving figures below—alone together on this small space.

From their elevated position they overlook a wide extent of country, stretching away in all directions, until swelling hills and ringing forests melt into the blue dimness of remote distance. On one side the prospect sweeps, with many a wave of smiling beauty, to where the prosperous town of Arlington crowns a bold ridge. On the other hand, the valley from which they have ascended lies in fertile loveliness, with the silver river making many a loop and curve upon the emerald surface of its fields and meadows. Scattered over the broad expanse, Fairfields, Oakdale, Southdale, and many other familiar dwellings, shine amid clustering trees; while beyond the wooded heights that inclose the lowlands in a frame of softest green, rise the distant mountains, draped in a tender haze, which make them appear like the very hills of heaven in their dreamy loveliness.

"Is it not beautiful?" Kate says, gazing afar, with a quickening glow in her eyes.

"It is wonderfully beautiful!" her companion answers. "I am sure I have never seen a lovelier country; I am sure I have never felt its loveliness as much as now."

"And how delightful it is to be so high!" she goes on, gayly. "Are we not well repaid for all the labour of climbing? Does not the air feel fresher here, just because we are so much above the rest? Ah!"—she sinks down on the rock as she speaks, with one daintily-booted foot extended from under the narrow, looped skirt of her habit—"why cannot all days be summer-days in the woods, and on great hills like this?"

"Why, indeed?" responds Tarleton. He flings himself down by her side as he speaks—there is barely room for them both on the rock—and, taking off his hat, throws back his head to look up in her face.

"I don't think anybody has the least idea that we are here," Kate goes on. "The foliage conceals us, but we can see them. Yonder is Mr. Proctor, wandering about as if in search of something."

"I fancy there can be little doubt what he is in search of," Tarleton remarks, looking down complacently on the top of Mr. Proctor's hat. "Shall I throw a stone, to let him know where you are?"

"It is not a matter of importance," she replies, carelessly. "You can, if you like."

"Then you may be sure that I don't like," he says, decidedly. "I hardly think he would be able to climb here, if he knew your whereabouts; he is a trifle over-weight for such gymnastics; but for fear jealousy should prove a spur, I will not enlighten him."

She looks at him with eyes which vainly endeavour not to laugh, while the colour deepens a little on her face.

"I am afraid, Mr. Tarleton," she says, "that you are inclined to forget that our acquaintance only dates from yesterday morning, and that you were not even introduced then."

"We should count time by heart-throbs, not by moments," quotes Tarleton, promptly. "And as for the introduction—though it is unkind of you to attempt to crush me with that—I think Lightfoot acted very well as master of ceremonies. By the same token, I owe Proctor that, do I not? On the whole, I will throw the stone, and let him have the gratification of knowing where you are."

"No—don't!" She utters the words impulsively, then blushes a shade deeper, and adds: "He might attempt to climb, you know; and since I am very sure he will not do it, I should not like to have his broken neck on my conscience."

"You think it would rest there more heavily than his broken heart?"

"I don't think Mr. Proctor is the kind of person to suffer from a broken heart," she says, with a slight shadow falling over the brightness of her face. She leans forward, plucks a small, hardy fern from the crevice of the rock, lays it on the palm of her hand, and, with her eyes fastened on it, adds: "Does he strike you in that way?"

"As a person likely to suffer from heart-break? Well, really, I cannot tell. I should not suppose that his feelings were of any deep order; but I may be mistaken."

"That is my opinion," she says. "I don't think he is the kind of person to—to take a disappointment very—very hard."

At this unconscious betrayal of what is in her thoughts with regard to the gentleman wandering below, Tarleton's satisfaction is very apparent on his face; but he manages to preserve a sufficient carelessness of tone, as he says:

"I imagine from something which Mr. Norton said to me last night, that your friends do not think there is any disappointment in store for him."

She lifts her eyes from the fern, and now her flush is vivid.

"Do you mean," she says, quickly, "that Mr. Norton told you anything about me, in connection with him?"

"Yes," Tarleton answers. "Mr. Norton told me that he hoped you were, or would soon be, engaged to him."

"Oh!" she says—and there is absolute consternation in her tone—"oh, I am so sorry!"

"Sorry! for what?" Tarleton asks, involuntarily.

"Sorry that there should be such a mistake—sorry if I have done anything to leave such an impression on any one's mind," she answers. "Of course, it is a mistake. I shall never be engaged to Mr. Proctor."

"And yet," says Tarleton, trying to restrain from his voice the joy which leaps up in his heart, "Mr. Norton speaks of him in the highest possible terms as 'an excellent match'—that is, one who possesses a goodly share of land, and houses, and cattle."

"I believe he is rich," she replies; "but what is that to me?" Then, with a quick flash of gaiety, she sings, softly:

"Sandy has ousen, has gear, and has kye,  
A house and a haddon, and siller forbye;  
But I'll tak my ain laddie, his staff in his hand,  
Before I'll ha' him, wi' his ousen and land."

"Would you?" says Tarleton, with a passionate light in his eyes. "On my soul, I believe you would."

"Only I haven't any 'ain laddie,'" she says, with a laugh. "But the principle of the thing—as far as Sandy is concerned—is the same as if I had."

"Poor Sandy!" says Tarleton. "I would suffer anything than know you were engaged to marry him. Yet I can be sorry for the man who

has set his heart on the hope of winning you, and will fail."

It is not strange that his words thrill the girl, for he puts no constraint upon his voice, which, eloquent at all times, is doubly eloquent now. But the youngest, the most constrained woman, possesses the power of dissembling when it comes to such an issue as this; and Kate smiles lightly, as she leans forward over the rock.

"Sandy would no doubt be deeply obliged to you for your sympathy," she says. "Where is he? Do you see him now?"

"No, he has vanished; and so will you, if you lean so far over that edge. Pray, don't! Remember, if you went down on those rocks below, it would be worse than a fall from a horse at full gallop."

"And a greater test for your gallantry. If I went over, what would you do?"

"There would be but one thing to do; I should follow you as rapidly as possible."

"Ah!" she laughs, and turns on him the radiant grey eyes he has by this time learned to know so well. "Then you would probably find me senseless; then you would lift my head to see if it was broken; then my hat would fall off; then my hair would come down, and then—What, then, Mr. Tarleton?"

For a moment he fails to read the meaning that lurks under her mischievous tone, in her mischievous glance; then it is the only time that such a thing can be recorded of him—he blushes. But, notwithstanding this untoward sign of confusion, his outward self-possession does not fail.

"Then," he says, gravely, "I should probably discover the fracture, which I did not find when I was forced to examine your head on a similar occasion. You may be sure that I have no desire to find it, however; so don't try the experiment of going over."

"Do you know," she says, with a gravity equal to his own, "that something very mysterious happened to me yesterday morning? When I arranged my hair, before going to ride, it was all of an even length; but when I came back, one lock—and a very large lock—had become at least a finger's-length shorter than the rest. Now, was not that strange? Do you think Lightfoot could have bitten it off?"

"It is possible that Lightfoot may have done so—in the interests of his master. Shall I call Mr. Proctor to account about it? I will challenge him, if you say so."

"Mr. Tarleton," she says, "I think you are the most—the very most audacious person I ever knew! I cannot imagine, in the least, why you should have cut off a lock of my hair; but I defy you to assert that you did not do so."

"It is impossible for me to assert anything of the kind, Miss Lawrence. I throw myself on your mercy, and confess that you are right."

"You really did it?" she says, with surprise. "I could not account for the loss in any other way; yet it seemed impossible to believe that you had deliberately cut a lock of hair from the head of a girl you had never spoken to in your life! Why did you do it, Mr. Tarleton? If you tell me the simple truth, I—I will try to forgive you for taking such a liberty."

"Will you?" he says, smiling. "You pledge yourself to that? Well, the truth is simply this: I could not help doing it. I never felt so much like a sneak in all my life as after the theft was accomplished; but I had no power to resist the tremendous temptation. Your hair and you have such lovely hair!—was all streaming loose over my arm. How could I think you would miss one little lock, when you have so much?"

"It was not a question of much or little," she says, indignantly, "but of your having the right to take any. Putting aside all—altruism, I must ask you to return what you cut off."

"If you insist upon my doing so, of course I must; but will you not be generous, and let me keep it? If you could imagine what it is to me, I think you would hardly refuse. You know so little of me, that I cannot ask more than this—now."

"Hallo! Kate!—Tarleton!"

It is a shout below, which proceeds from Will's mighty lungs. They look over the rock, and perceive that he is signalling them.

"We must go down," says Kate, rising. "No doubt supper is ready."

Tarleton does not press the point of the hair until they are clambering down the rocks, and Kate is in a measure at his mercy. Then, with her hand in his, as he assists her from one stepping-place to another, he says:

"You have not told me yet. I may keep the lock, may I not?"

"It strikes me that to ask permission to keep that which you have already taken, is rather reversing the order of things," she replies.

And with this he is content.

## CHAPTER XI.

"I would have hid her needle in my heart,  
To save her little finger from a scratch  
No deeper than the skin; my ears could hear  
Her lightest breath; her least remark was worth  
The experience of the wise. I went and came;  
Her voice fled always through the summer-land;  
I spoke her name alone. Three happy days!  
The flower of each, those moments when we met."

The radiant September days pass swiftly and gayly. To do Miss Palmer honour, the neighbourhood routes from its usual state of social dullness, and one party of pleasure quickly succeeds another. There are rides and rambles in

the beautiful woods; there are dances and croquet-parties; there are rows on the river, when the glow of sunset is reflected on its breast, and when the silver light of the "hunter's moon" shines broadly over stream and plain and hills.

During these days, whose step is so light, whose voice so joyous, whose heart so gay, as Kate's! The sunshine which rests on the fair September woodlands is not half so bright as her face; the moonlight which sleeps on the river is not nearly so tender as her eyes. "The light that never was on land or sea"—the light that, unmarred by the memory or the fear of pain, no human life can know but once—is shed over her like a benediction. She is the foremost spirit in every plan of pleasure; and, riding, rowing, or dancing, Tarleton is ever at her side. From this gentleman no more is heard of leaving; on the contrary, he announces his intention of remaining at Southdale until the Arlington races, which are to take place in October, and for which his horses are entered. To him, as to Kate, these are golden days; days to be enjoyed with the fullest enjoyment as they pass; days to look back upon from some dreary height of the after-time with wistful, passionate regret.

It is possible that his devotion would not be allowed to pass unobserved by those most interested in the girl's life—to wit, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence—if it were not for the fact that their attention is absorbed at this time with Sophy's affairs. Wilmer has taken his courage in his hands, marched on his fate, and conquered it. In other words, he has asked Sophy to marry him, and Sophy has answered that she will do so. An engagement in the family—a first engagement, especially—is always a matter of importance; and so it chanced that not even Janet has much attention to spare for Kate's affairs.

It moreover happens, that the only person who has a direct personal interest in Tarleton's conduct is at this time called away. It is with great reluctance that Mr. Proctor obeys a summons to return to his plantation, without having come to an understanding with Kate; but, having confided his perplexity to Will, that young gentleman advises him to hold his peace.

"You'll only make things unpleasant, and ruin your chances altogether, by speaking," he says. "She doesn't care a straw for you now; one can see that with half an eye. But there's no depending on women. What they like to-day, they'll dislike to-morrow; and what they dislike to-day, they'll like to-morrow. Patient waiters are no losers. You go and attend to your business, and after a while come back. You may have a better chance then."

"But here's that fellow, Tarleton," urges Proctor. "If I go away, I leave the whole held to him."

"The wholeiddlesticks!" says Will. "You don't suppose Tarleton has any idea of wanting to marry Kate, do you? Why, he hasn't a sixpence worth of property free from debt! Kate knows his position and his character, for I've warned her about both; and she is only amusing herself with him, take my word for that!"

"Girls sometimes fall in love with men even when they haven't a sixpence," observes Mr. Proctor, gloomily. "and I really think you have Tarleton here too much."

Nevertheless, he follows his friend's advice, and goes away without expressing his feelings, save by crushing Kate's hand in a grasp so strenuous that her muscles ache from it for half an hour afterward. "I shall be back soon," he says; and then he turns his face heroically toward his neglected plantation.

The girl he leaves behind him is very much relieved by his departure. If her heart could possibly be made lighter, it would be rendered so by this fact; for, since the day when she returned from that fateful ride on Lightfoot, she has never been able to laugh at him as she freely laughed before. His presence has been to her an uncomfortable reminder of pain that she may yet be forced to inflict, and his attentions have more than once conflicted with Tarleton's in a manner hard to bear. Altogether, she feels that he has done the best thing possible in going away—going away in discreet silence, too—and her face is a shade brighter than usual, as, having watched him safely down the avenue and out of the gate, she takes her hat, calls the children—who are always ready to follow her—and goes into the garden.

There she is found, half an hour later, by a young man, who, running down the steps of the terrace on which the house is built, comes toward her. At the moment of his approach she is standing on a high stool, under a grape-arbor, intent upon gathering some of the fast-ripening scuppernongs from the trellis above. Through the vine-leaves shifting lights and shadows play over her face and figure; and when the children cry, "Kate, Mr. Tarleton is coming!" she does not descend from her perch, but simply turns and looks down upon him like a goddess from a pedestal—only no goddess ever smiled so sweet and bright a smile as that which is his greeting.

"If you like scuppernong grapes," she says, "you have just come in time, for these are the first of the season. The children and myself are having a feast. If you want some, hold up your hat."

He obediently holds up his hat, and receives a shower of the golden-brown fruit.

"Thanks! that is sufficient," he says. "I have not come to eat grapes, but to propose an expedition—unless you have had a surfeit of riding lately."

"A surfeit of riding!" she repeats. "That is likely! As far as I am concerned, I am ready