

tunity, which of late I have begun to think I should never have, to see you," says Tarleton. "I would not go over to Fairfields yesterday or the day before, because I knew there was no chance of such a thing; but I counted—you don't know how I counted—on this hunt. I knew you could not resist coming, and you can imagine, therefore, how pleasant it was to hear, as soon as I joined you, that Vaughn had come by your request."

"But it was not by my request," says Kate. "I never thought of asking, or—wanting him."

"Did you not?" says Tarleton. "Then it is all right! But I should like to turn him over in that bottom for making me believe that you did. I don't mind losing the hounds at all now—on the contrary, it strikes me rather in the light of a fortunate occurrence."

"It does not strike me in that light," says Kate. "What are we to do about it?"

"Clearly there is nothing to do except to go home. To ride up and down the country inquiring of every man we meet if he has seen the hounds, is a trifle too absurd. One of the first maxims which my father instilled into my youthful mind was, 'If you can't keep up with the dogs, you had better stay at home'; and it is impossible to explain why we failed to keep up with them."

"I think our appearance explains," says Kate, with a laugh. "Look how those people stare at us!"

The people in question are a party of ladies who fill an open carriage—for it must be understood that by this time the day is well advanced.

"The best thing we can do will be to leave the highway for the present," says Tarleton, pausing to open a gate, which chances to be the same which Mr. Vaughn opened a few days before when Kate proposed their short cut through the Southdale fields. "We will call by the house," he adds, as she rides in, "and have ourselves and our horses made a little presentable. It will never do to appear at Fairfields in such a plight as we are now."

To this suggestion Kate utters no demur—in fact it strikes her as the best thing possible under the circumstances. "Fancy what everybody would say if we rode up looking like this!" she observes. "Miss Vaughn would conceive a more dreadful idea of fox-hunting than she has already."

"When is she going away?" asks Tarleton. "I do not know—but not till after the races certainly. Mr. Vaughn seems very much interested in them."

"That follows of course. I suppose no man makes more money on the turf than Ashton Vaughn. No doubt you think, or may think, that I have no right to talk, that those who live in glass houses, etc.; but there is, and always has been, this difference between Vaughn and myself: I like racing for the sake of the sport, and I have spent ten times what I have made on the turf; but he cares nothing for the sport, and everything for the gain."

"Is it more creditable to spend money on the turf than to make it?" asks Kate. "I wonder why?"

Tarleton does not answer, for at this moment they reach the stable-gate, which a negro boy opens.

"Come to the house, Bob, and take these horses," says his master. "They must be washed off well and rubbed down."

"Where are all the rest?" asks Kate, remembering the number of loiterers about the stable when she was here last. "And where are the horses?"

"Gone to Arlingford," Tarleton answers. "You know the races begin to-morrow. I told Pierce to take them over to-day, and it seems he made an early start."

"Did you know," says Kate, as they ride towards the house with Bob trudging behind, "that Pierce is an old acquaintance of Mr. Vaughn's?"

"No," Tarleton replies; "but it is very likely. How did you chance to be aware of their acquaintance?"

"I saw them meet here at your stable-yard gate one afternoon when Mr. Vaughn and myself were riding, and it was so late that we made a short cut home. It struck me that they must have known each other peculiarly well from the expression of your groom's face."

"What kind of an expression?" asks Tarleton, with surprise and interest.

"I can hardly tell, further than that he seemed startled and not pleased."

"Not pleased, eh? Probably Vaughn is aware of some antecedents in his past life which Mr. Pierce would prefer to keep quiet. Now, let me take you down"—they have drawn up at the entrance of the house—"Bob, go and tell Aunt Rachel to come here."

Bob disappears in the direction of the kitchen, and shortly reappears in the rear of Aunt Rachel—one of the most respectable of the old-time class of family servants. She is dressed with scrupulous cleanliness, a long apron of blue-and-white check, faded from many washings, covering the front of her dress, and a bright-colored kerchief is arranged turbanwise above her black, wrinkled face. Her eyes expand when she sees the appearance of the figures before her, and, while she makes an old-fashioned courtesy, Tarleton speaks:

"Aunt Rachel, here is a young lady you must take charge of."

"How is you, Miss Kate?" says Aunt Rachel. "I hope you're well, ma'am, and all the rest of the family. Bless my soul, honey, but you is

muddy! Mass Frank oughtn't to a' let you git spattered up like this."

"Mass Frank couldn't help it," says Kate, for Tarleton has turned to speak to Bob, and does not hear the reproach. "It will soon rub off, now that it is dry. There is no harm done. But, where must I go?"

"You come this way," says Aunt Rachel, opening a door which leads into a passage, where a staircase winds away to the upper part of the house.

#### CHAPTER XVIII.

"All thoughts, all passions, all delights,  
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,  
Are all but ministers of Love,  
And feed his sacred flame."

Half an hour later, Kate returns, with all traces of mud removed from her habit, her face washed, her hair rebraided, her whole appearance as neat as when Mr. Vaughn was pleased by it in the hall at Fairfields six hours before.

As she opens the blinds of the sitting-room and glances in, Tarleton rises from the chair in which he has been sitting, with an exclamation. "You look fresh as Aurora!" he says. "Any other woman would be completely knocked out by such a morning. Won't you come in? I have contrived to make myself a little more comfortable since you were here last. This chair"—he moves one forward—"is really very good for lounging, if you will try it."

"Yes, it is very pleasant," says Kate, as she sinks into the soft depths; "but ought we not to be starting home? When uncle gets back to Fairfields, and finds that I am not there, he will be uneasy."

"I think not. I flatter myself he knows me well enough to feel sure that no harm will happen to you while you are under my care. As for Vaughn, if his anxiety takes him into that quagmire to search for you, he will be apt to come out, if he comes out at all, a sadder and muddier man."

"I don't think there is the least probability that he will go in," says Kate, with a laugh. "But really we ought to start."

"Really we ought to do nothing of the kind. I don't know how you feel, but I am absolutely faint from hunger. As for riding five miles farther without having first supported the inner man—the thing is simply impossible. I should sink by the wayside."

"What nonsense!"

"Do you think so? Well, a goddess like yourself may not feel any needs of the kind, but I am a very ordinary mortal, with a very good appetite. I told Aunt Rachel to send us in something as quickly as possible, and I hope you will honor me by breaking bread beneath the roof of Southdale."

"What must be, must be," says Kate, on the simplicity of whose youthful imagination the majesty of Mrs. Grundy has never dawned. "I shall see what sort of an establishment you keep," she adds, with a laugh.

"It is Aunt Rachel who keeps it—not I. Ah, here the collation comes. I told her we were more particular about haste than variety. Not that I am in haste, but I feared you might be if I detained you long."

An ebony imp, in a white apron—Aunt Rachel's grandson, whom she is bringing up in the way he should go, with many counsels and much use of that rod—which Solomon commended—comes in and sets a small table with covers for two. Then he retires, and presently returns with a salver, on which are placed broiled chicken, deviled ham, a feathery omelet, and the old-fashioned biscuit, which a new generation are forgetting how to make. As he deposits them on the table, he speaks solemnly:

"Granny say she's sorry she haven't no rolls, Mass Frank, but it's so onertain when you's comin' back—"

"Tell her it is all right," interrupts Tarleton. "Now, Miss Lawrence allow me to conduct you to the table, and will you be kind enough to pour out the coffee?"

"With pleasure," says Kate, gayly, sitting down and beginning to pour the coffee, which flows as clear as French brandy into the cups.

It is a pleasant little feast which follows. Such moments are the sweeter for their rarity and brevity. It is doubtful if in all its wide journeying the sunlight falls on a happier pair than those who are seated together here. There is with both a joyousness, a freedom from care, an indifference to anything save the passing hour, which gives to this bit of pleasure an idyllic charm, transforming the coffee into nectar, and making Aunt Rachel's biscuit taste like celestial food.

Tarleton has himself well in hand, and startles Kate by no look or tone significant of deeper feeling. To him this is a golden hour, and he would willingly keep its charm unbroken to the last. Only when he can no longer restrain himself, he says, abruptly:

"Do you ever see ghosts? Don't be startled!"—with a laugh—"I don't mean anything very terrible. But I see them sometimes, and I fear that henceforward this room will be haunted for me. I shall never enter it without looking for a slender figure in a habit, with a pair of sweet, gray eyes."

"Shall you not?" says Kate. "Then, if I am to be transformed into a ghost, the sooner I go the better. But you live charmingly. Aunt Rachel takes the best possible care of you."

"And advises, directs, and bullies me as if I were ten years old."

"You ought to bear the advising and direct-

ing, and even the bullying, because she is so devoted to you—and affection is the most valuable thing in the world."

"I suppose it is—even the affection of an old black woman in a turban. What is it somebody says!"

"Beauty is easy enough to win,  
But one is not loved every day."

I don't know about beauty being easy enough to win—for beauties usually have a very high opinion of themselves—but the accuracy of the last line is unimpeachable."

"Yes," assents Kate, whose thoughts are thus recalled to her own grievance, which she had for the time forgotten, "and when one has to face the prospect of leaving everybody who loves one, or whom one loves, it is—it is very hard."

"What do you mean?" asks Tarleton, looking at her with startled surprise. He forgets all conventionalities in the fear which comes over him. "Are you thinking of marrying Vaughn?" he asks, quickly.

It is now Kate's turn to look astonished.

"What do you mean by such a question?" she says. "Do you think a man like Mr. Vaughn would think of marrying me? And if he did—but we need not talk of anything so absurd. No—I spoke almost without thinking; but there is no reason why I should not tell you that Miss Brooke has asked me to go away with her, and Aunt Margaret says I ought to go."

"Miss Brooke," repeats Tarleton. He certainly has not expected such news, and from his face it is manifest that it does not please him. "I did not think—but I suppose it is natural that she should want you. Do you intend to go?"

"I suppose I must," Kate answers, despondently. "Aunt Margaret says it is a brilliant opportunity, and that I should be very foolish if I refused it."

"But what do you want with brilliant opportunities? You are very happy as you are."

"Certainly I am happy, and I don't want them—that is, I don't think so."

"If you qualify your opinion already, you will be likely soon to find out that you do want them. But I had hoped—different things."

He rises abruptly, and takes a turn across the room; then comes back to her side.

"Everything seems in league to take you away from us," he says, in a half-smothered voice. "You said a little while ago that Ashton Vaughn would not think of desiring to marry you—so you have not yet learned that he is here for no other purpose than that."

"Mr. Tarleton!" She looks at him in amazement. "This is not a fit subject for a jest."

"A jest! Good Heavens! do you think I could jest about it? It has been the most deadly earnest to me ever since his sister told me the whole plan the other day."

"What plan do you mean?" she asks, incredulous, astonished, yet with a dim instinct of something to be told which she will be forced to believe.

"So you have heard nothing? Well, it is simply this: Your uncle, Mr. Ashton, wishes to find an heir, and he prefers one who can take and bear his name. At the same time it is to be supposed he is not easy about you, for he makes it a condition of leaving his fortune to Vaughn, that he shall marry you. Hence the reason of the latter being here."

There is a moment's silence. Then, "Are you sure?" Kate asks—her grave, startled eyes on his face. "Is there no mistake?"

"Not the least, unless Flori—Miss Vaughn manufactured the story, and I hardly think her inventive faculties are equal to that. So," with an effort to speak lightly, "you have only to put out your hand—to say Yes when you are asked—to secure the incomparable Ashton and your uncle's fortune."

"We will put the incomparable Ashton aside," she says, coolly. "He is nothing to me. But my uncle's fortune is something. Do you know what?"

"I suppose you feel that it is justly yours." "Justly mine!" Her eyes flash. "I feel that sooner than touch one sixpence of it, I would—and understand I mean what I say—I would beg for my daily bread!"

"Then Vaughn has not much of a chance," says Tarleton, making no vain effort to suppress the joy which he feels.

"Not the shadow of a chance," she answers. "If he came of himself, he would have none; but to come because Mr. Ashton sent him—what can one say of a man who is so mercenary and contemptible as that?"

"Say that he is no worse than multitudes of his fellows. Give him his due. No doubt he thinks that you are far from a drawback to the fortune. Miss Vaughn said, with unusual devoutness, that it seems quite a providential thing that you are so charming."

"It was kind of you to discuss me with her."

"Don't you know that you would be safe in my hands?" he asks, with a strain of tenderness in his voice. "I was simply receptive. I had no objection to learning the secret of Vaughn's tactics."

"And after you learned it—what then?"

"Then I thought it likely that we might be called upon to lose you—and now it seems that I was only mistaken in the means through which this misfortune is to befall us. Miss Brooke is intrinsically better than Vaughn, but the result will be the same. If you go, you will never come back—at least, as you are."

"That shows how little you know me," she says, quickly. "Nothing can change my love for my home and my friends."

"You are too young and too inexperienced to know how people change," he says. "None of us are strong enough to resist some influences. Character is like wax, and, whether we know it or not, is constantly moulded by circumstances."

"But hearts are not wax," she says, "and they can remain true."

"They are the last thing which do," he answers. "Wealth, pleasure, power, excitement—the heart which, directly or indirectly, is not changed by these things is a *rara avis* yet to be found."

"Is it?" says Kate. "Then I suppose I need not be presumptuous enough to fancy that mine would stand the test."

She turns away as she speaks, for tears are in her eyes, which she does not wish him to see. His words and his tone have wounded both her heart and her pride. "All this is very foolish," she goes on after a minute, rising abruptly. "Whether I change, or whether I do not, is a matter of no importance to any one but myself. The matter is settled—I must go with Miss Brooke."

Tarleton is quick to discover the quiver of feeling in her voice, and with one step he is at her side. "Have I vexed you?" he says, taking her hand in both his own. "Don't you know I was thinking of myself? When a man sees himself on the eve of losing all that is most precious to him in the world, can he keep silence? Kate!"—as she tries to draw away her hand—"don't you understand? I love you! I love you! I have loved you since the first hour we met!"

The words leap out with impetuous passion. A moment before he had no idea of uttering them; but the temptation is too great for his powers of resistance. He holds Kate's hand in a grasp which, if she were thinking of it, might wring from her a cry of pain, and eagerly hurries on: "You must have felt it—you must know it! My whole heart is yours. I have not kept back even a thought for any one else in the world. Kate, I have no right to ask it—for I never felt so bitterly before how my life has been squandered and wasted—but can you love me?"

Kate looks up with her dewy eyes gleaming. The very breath seems hushed on her parted lips: "You forget," she cries, in an accent of pain and reproach, "Miss Vaughn!"

This is not very clear, but Tarleton understands what she means to imply, and a quick flush mounts to his brow. "What has Miss Vaughn to do with it?" he asks. "Has she been speaking to you of me?"

"She? Oh, no!" Kate answers. "But I have seen, I have heard—" Then, with a sudden, sharp tone, jarring the music of her voice, "Let go my hand. How dare you detain me like this?"

"I would dare a great deal more to make you listen to me," says Tarleton. "You shall hear me, whether you will or not! Florida Vaughn is nothing to me—that I swear on my honor. What you are, I have told you. Do not let us waste the precious minutes by speaking of any one but ourselves. If you can love me, for God's sake tell me so!"

The passionate appeal touches and thrills Kate to the centre of her soul. It has been already said that she is not likely to count the cost of anything, and she does not count the cost of this. She does not pause to consider what suffering it may bring to her, what sacrifice it may entail. When she answers, all her heart is in her voice.

"If I can! Oh, don't you know?—I do!"

"My darling! my bonny darling!" he cries, and clasps her in his arms.

So for a few short minutes they may be left. Soft sunshine streams into the room, birds are singing outside, the world is going its accustomed course, while for these two, enchanted sands are dropping into the glass of time. In truth:

"The calendar hath not an evil day  
For souls made one by love, and even death  
Were sweetness, if it came like rolling waves,  
While they two clasp each other, and foresee  
No life apart."

Presently Tarleton says, "How little I deserve to win such a treasure? Kate, if you only knew—"

But Kate places her hand over his lips. "Hush!" she says. "I don't wish to know anything. And I am no treasure—far from it. You will find that out before long."

"Shall I?" He draws the slender figure closer to him with a light-hearted laugh. "Treasure or not, whatever you are, you are mine!" he says, exultantly. "More than once in my life I have felt like blowing my brains out. Now I am glad I refrained from doing so. One such hour as this is enough to sweeten the whole burden of existence. Kate, what have you done to me? What spell of enchantment have you laid on me that I should love you better than I ever loved any human being in all my life before?"

Kate smiles. What woman does not like to receive such an assurance as this?—and Tarleton's earnestness cannot be doubted. The veriest skeptic of human faith or truth, looking at his face, would own that there is no material for a deceiver there. That it tells its story of love or hate, pleasure or anger, too plainly, is the worst that can be said of it. More than once people have applied to him that telling line,

"Truest friend and bravest foe,"