

a flood of cheerful light pouring over the piazza. The rush of the advancing horse has been heard and several figures hurry out as she draws up.

"Who the deuce is riding like this?" asks Will's voice. "What!—by Jove!—Kate!"

"Yes, it is I, Will," answers Kate, from whose nerveless fingers the rein has dropped, and who is trembling like an aspen-leaf with spent excitement. "Come, take me down—and then go to the river to meet Mr. Proctor, who is bringing Mr. Tarleton in a boat. He has been shot."

"Who—Proctor?" asks Will in amazement, as he advances quickly and lifts the slender figure from the saddle.

"Oh, no—Mr. Tarleton," she answers. "I found him in the road, wounded and insensible. Don't stop to ask questions,—dear Will—go at once! Is uncle here?"

"Yes," answers Mr. Lawrence, advancing. "What is this!—Tarleton has been shot! How! By whom?"

Kate endeavors to say, "I do not know," but voice and strength and sight forsake her utterly, all at once. She puts her hand to her heart, and, with a gasp, falls fainting on the ground at Will's feet.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Go! be sure of my love—by that treason forgiven; Of my prayers—by the blessings they win thee from Heaven; Of my grief—(guess the length of the sword by the sheath's)— By the silence of life, more pathetic than death's! Go—be clear of that day!"

"Who could have shot him?"

This is the question which Mr. Lawrence asks Will, as they take their way down to the river, followed by three or four servants carrying a door which has been hastily lifted from its hinges—and it does not require much consideration for Will to answer:

"That fellow Pierce, I am convinced. I was always sure from the scoundrel's looks that he had black blood in him, and this is the revenge he takes on Tarleton. Well," shrugging his shoulders slightly, "the poor fellow seems marked out for ill-luck, so I suppose he might as well be shot to-night as to-morrow morning—he was to have met Vaughn at sunrise."

"I suspected as much," says Mr. Lawrence, gravely. "On that account, unless his wound is very serious, I can hardly regret that this has occurred. I don't expect you to agree with me, Will—my sentiments were different at your age—but it is better to be shot than to shoot another, better to be killed than to kill."

"I should say that depended entirely upon the relative value of the lives in question," replies Will, coolly. "But one thing is very certain—Vaughn will not be sorry for this."

Few more words are spoken between them, until they reach the river and pause on the bank to wait for the boat, which has not yet arrived—so fleetly had Lightfoot carried Kate. It is not a long waiting which is required of them, however. Before many minutes have elapsed, a dark object comes into sight on the stream—at first faintly discerned in the dim light, but soon resolving itself into the boat, with Mr. Proctor still rowing as vigorously as when he parted from Kate.

"Have you sent for a doctor?" is his first question. "I am afraid this poor fellow is done for—he is shot through the lungs."

"Yes, I despatched a messenger for Sanford at once," Will answers. "Here, boys, pull the boat higher on the bank, so that we can lift him carefully."

They lift out the form of the wounded and still unconscious man, and, having placed him with the utmost gentleness on the hastily arranged litter, bear him up the lawn to the house. Not until they have nearly reached this, does Mr. Proctor say to Will, with whom he is walking:

"Since you knew I was coming, Miss Kate must have arrived safely—I was very sorry to let her take such a ride alone."

"The ride was a trifle to Kate," Will answers. "She would have taken it for anybody—but I fear she took it more willingly for Tarleton than she would for any one else."

"I am sure of it," says Mr. Proctor in a low tone. "There is no doubt but that she loves him, as I always knew she could love—God bless her!"

"God help her!" says Will, who is not usually devout. "I am afraid it is a very bad business all round."

This is an opinion concurred in by every one under the roof of Fairfields that night—by Mrs. Lawrence, who does not fancy the *bouleversé* attendant upon having a desperately wounded man introduced into her household; by the doctor, who does not hesitate to say that he considers Tarleton's chances of recovery very slight; by Miss Vaughn, who is shaken out of her usual selfish calm by emotions of which she hardly imagined herself capable; by Janet and Miss Brooke, perhaps most of all, as they watch together over Kate, whose death-like swoon is of long duration. Despite all restorative measures, it is long before the dark lashes lift, the eyes open again to the wretchedness of life, and the breath comes through the pale lips with the sad sigh of returning consciousness.

She asks but one question—"Is he dead?" and when it is answered in the negative, says no more. In truth she seems strangely and utterly prostrated—by the nervous shock, the doctor, who is presently called in to look at her, says. On some high-strung organizations, an overwhelming blow has this effect. To Kate,

who suffers as she enjoys, with her whole heart and strength, pain means something which a duller nature can no more comprehend than the lowest forms of animal life can comprehend the keen sensations of the highest. Surely it is a sad and terrible gift, that of a soul capable of sounding the full gamut of passion, for

"Chords that vibrate sweetest pleasure Thrill the deepest notes of woe."

and who needs to be told that woes are far more plentiful than pleasures along the path of life?

When Tarleton is restored to the consciousness of which the fall from his horse and the loss of blood together deprived him, he is able to answer the question of who shot him. It was Pierce, he states at once. "The instant I was shot, I turned and saw him. It was like a flash, you understand, for the next moment I was falling from my horse, and I knew no more; but there was no room for mistake. You must make my apologies about to-morrow morning, Will," he adds, more weakly. "Tell Vaughn that if I live, I will meet him when and where he pleases, as soon as I am able."

"I think you may be satisfied with your present condition, without sending any such blood-thirsty message," says Will. "I'll see Vaughn, however, you may depend on it."

In consequence of this promise, he rides early the next morning into Arlingford, and sees Mr. Vaughn, who has already heard of Tarleton's accident, and expresses regret for it—which regret is understood to mean that he could not have the pleasure of shooting him. No arrangement is made with regard to the future, for Will knows that Tarleton's life is hanging on a thread, and Mr. Vaughn himself has too thorough an appreciation of the benefit of being alive to desire to press the matter further than necessary toward a bloody conclusion.

Later in the day, this gentleman appears at Fairfields, and makes his adieu to the family. He finds Miss Vaughn feverishly anxious to be gone—feverishly anxious to escape from an atmosphere which, even to her epicureanism, is fraught with pain—and so the carriage is ordered, trunks are brought down, and, together with Randal, they take their departure. Miss Vaughn does not see Kate before going. Since she dropped senseless at Will's feet, no one has seen her except her aunt, her cousins, and Miss Brooke. When the carriage containing the people whose coming was destined to so greatly affect her life drives away, the girl whom they came to seek is lying in the heavy stupor produced by opiates, with circles under her closed eyes, and strange, new lines of suffering about her mouth.

So she lies, as day follows day—only rousing herself to beg that if Tarleton is dying they will tell her, so that she may go to him. There is no absolute illness, the doctor declares—at least, no illness that medicine can reach. If there was anything to do, she would rise up to do it—but there is nothing. She knows that they would not let her go to him even if she asked to do so, and why should she ask? She has no right to be by his side. That place is for the woman he loves, and he never loved her—she was only a plaything for sunny days, not a helpmate to sweeten with tender love any storm that God might send.

This is what she says to herself again and again, during the long hours that seem as if they would never end—hours in which the sunlight is, for her, blotted from the earth. She cannot eat, she does not sleep, except under the influence of narcotics; she simply lies in uncomplaining silence, consuming her soul with grief and suspense. "Kate," says Janet once, "were you engaged to him?" And Kate looks at her with eyes full of pain the other never forgets, and answers, "No!"

During these days Tarleton is hovering on the narrowest point of that narrow line which divides life and death. Despite the fact that his death-warrant has been read by every physician in or near Arlingford, he does not die. Men may be shot through the lungs and yet recover—though their recovery must, perforce, be long and tedious. Tarleton's promises to be this, but as soon as the physicians give hope of a favorable issue, he is, by his own urgent request, conveyed to Southdale. Kate is told nothing of the intended departure until after he is gone. She utters a low, bitter cry when she hears it—for it seems as if now, indeed, the last slender link between them was snapped—but, happily, she does not know with what yearning wistfulness Tarleton's eyes looked to the last for one glimpse of her—and looked in vain.

On the following day Miss Brooke announces that it is necessary for her to think of departure. She has only waited for a decisive result in Tarleton's case, and now that it is believed he will recover, she tells Mr. Lawrence that the sooner Kate is taken away the better.

"I am sure of it," he says, "and I cannot tell you how much I am indebted to you for taking her away just now. Though I have a regard for Frank Tarleton, nothing would induce me to consent to her marriage with him; and I am anxious for the unfortunate affair to be put as completely as possible out of her mind."

"I shall certainly do all in my power to accomplish that end," says Miss Brooke, emphatically—and then she betakes herself to Kate.

"I received a letter from Herbert this morning, my dear," she says, "and he is growing so impatient over my delay, that we must prepare for flight. Do you think you can be ready to start on—well, this is Tuesday, so we will say Thursday?"

Kate—who is a mere shadow of that blooming

girl who gave her last radiant smile to Tarleton on the Arlingford race-course—looks at her with surprise.

"Do you mean to take me with you?" she asks. "I—had almost forgotten it. But I should not think you would care for such a dull companion as I am now."

"We will change all that," says Miss Brooke, cheerily. "Trust me, you will not be dull long after I get you away."

"I fear you are mistaken," the girl answers simply, "but I will go with you, if you are kind enough to want me—and I shall try to make the best of everything."

This docility astonishes and delights Miss Brooke. She expected resistance, perhaps even refusal, and she announces the result to Mr. Lawrence with great satisfaction. That gentleman is fully as much gratified as herself.

"In fresh scenes and with fresh associations, my poor little girl will recover all that she has lost," he says. "No one dies of a heart-tribute."

This would seem at the present time scant comfort to the poor little girl of whom he speaks. It would be far easier to die, she thinks, than to summon resolution enough to rise and face the blank prospect of life. The grayness which settles over the world when the sun has gone is but a poor type of the dull color which existence wears as it stretches before her eyes. Yet she makes a brave fight with regret, and night and morning pours forth her whole soul in passionate prayer for strength to forget—just to forget.

Those around her feel that that they have hardly realized how much she has changed until they see the apathy with which she prepares for her journey. A few months ago the prospect now opening before her would have filled her with mingled sadness and delight—sadness for leaving Fairfields, delight at going into the brilliant world which she has never seen. Now she seems to feel these things but little—the last, indeed, not at all—though when she goes with Mr. Lawrence on the evening before her departure, to bid farewell to the horses and dogs, this trying ceremony nearly upsets her composure. Her eyes are full of tears when she puts her arms round Diana's neck, and when she finally tears herself away from the fawning caresses of the devoted hounds. Then, as she takes her way back to the house, by her uncle's side, clinging to his arm, with the friendly twilight about her for a mantle, she summons courage to utter something which is on her mind.

"I could not go away feeling that I was keeping a secret from you," she says. "I must tell you something, and—and why I did not speak before—"

So the story is told—all save the part which Miss Vaughn bore in it. That Kate cannot bring herself to relate. It is not necessary, she thinks—it will throw a light on Tarleton's character and conduct which she feels sure her uncle could not forgive. And it is well that she refrains, for Mr. Lawrence's indignation is great enough without that addition.

"I hardly suspected Frank Tarleton of such a thing!" he says. "I thought that with all his faults he was a man of honor. I can never pardon him for daring to trifle with you, and draw you into a secret love-affair. Have you ended it?—are you sure you have ended it?"

"I am sure," answers Kate, with a bitter pang, as she remembers that passionate parting in the starlit garden. "Everything is ended between us."

"I am glad to hear it," says Mr. Lawrence. "It would have been my duty to end everything if you had not done so. Kate, I told you before that I could not consent for you to marry this man. I tell you so again, and more emphatically. Unless you choose to defy my wishes, you will not listen to another word of love from him."

"I shall not do that," answers Kate. "I could not repay all I owe to you by disregarding your wishes. If—if it killed me, I should do what you said."

"It will not kill you!" he replies, in a kind tone. "You have too much courage to pine for the sake of a man who is not worthy of you. My bonny Kate is made, I am sure, of better stuff than that."

His bonny Kate does not answer, but when they enter the house, and she goes to her room, she falls on her bed in a passion of sorrow. Oh, to see him! Oh, to hear his voice once—only once more! The iron walls of a hopeless separation are closing between them; and look where she will, there is no hope of escape. If she were free to act as she pleased, she would still say as she said when they parted, that all is ended; yet, notwithstanding this, her uncle's emphatic prohibition seems to set them farther apart, to make her understand afresh how entirely he has gone out of her life—gone, though her heart cries and sickens for him with a mighty and unutterable longing!

The next morning—her last morning at Fairfields—she rises early from a sleepless pillow, with her thoughts full of the parting which lies before her. It is not always true that

"In life's cup of parting, There is the bitterness who stay behind,"

for there is no sadder thing than exile from some spot to which the heart-strings cling, and as the moment of departure draws near and nearer, Kate feels already the hopeless desolation which will settle upon her when she has left behind all the familiar surroundings of her life—that happy life which ends to-day as entirely as if it was death, not absence, that lay before her. She does not realize this fact in its completeness, or her

heart would be still more heavy. It is only when we have grown older, and have fully mastered the sad knowledge that "nothing can be as it has been before," that time is relentless in its changes, and that human feelings alter as much as human lives, that we feel the keenest pang which lies in parting. "We will return," we cry, "next year, perhaps." But who can forecast next year! Say that we are unchanged, say that we return, shall we find the old sunshine on the spot, or in the tender eyes that grew moist over farewell! Who can tell! Therefore let us hoard the golden minutes of to-day, while they are with us, and count on no to-morrow—since to-morrow never comes as we have dreamed of it.

Tears are the order of the day at Fairfields. In all the household there is not a dry eye, and the children howl in chorus when the carriage drives up to the door, and they realize that Kate is really going from them. Kate herself feels spent with emotion, and she bids a speechless good-bye to all except Janet and Will, who are to accompany them to Arlingford.

There is still another farewell before her, for which she is not prepared. They have disembarked at the station, and are waiting for the train while Will buys the tickets, when a horseman rides up at full speed, dismounts quickly, and comes forward with his honest face—the face of Mr. Proctor—full of eagerness.

"I was afraid I would be too late to see you," he says, taking Kate's hand in his cordial grasp. "I knew you were to leave to-day, and I have come twenty-five miles since daylight to bid you good-bye."

"Have you?" she says; and grateful tears rush into the eyes that look more kindly on him than they ever looked before. "How good you are!—how good you always have been! I am very glad you came. I thought last night, when I was thinking of all my friends, that I should like to tell you good-bye—which, one is glad to remember, means 'God be with you.'"

The sweetness of her words, and still more of her voice, touch him beyond expression. Something like a mist comes over his sight, and he says, hurriedly:

"Will you walk down the platform with me! There are still five minutes before the train is due."

She turns without a word, and walks with him. One minute of the five passes before either can speak—Kate, because her heart is full to overflowing, Mr. Proctor because he hesitates how to begin. But the shortness of the opportunity warns him to utter quickly what he has to say, and, therefore, he begins abruptly:

"I told you the last time—the last time but one, I mean—when we were alone together, that I loved you, and I asked you to marry me. No—don't say a word! I understand now that it can never be, and I have only mentioned it again to tell you that I want you to think of me as your friend—your friend who would do anything to serve you. I am not a man to make professions which mean nothing—every one who knows me knows that—and you must believe that I mean exactly what I say when I tell you that if ever you want a friend, or need a service, you have only to call upon me, and I will go to the end of the world at your bidding. Will you remember this?"

"Oh, you are too kind!" says Kate, choking back her sobs. "How can I thank you!—how can I tell you how sorry I am for any pain I have cost you! If there was anything I could do to serve you, I would do it," she says, looking up with tender, liquid eyes. "But you see how it is—you would have nothing but love, and that, alas! I cannot give you."

"It is not your fault that you cannot," he says, gently. "How could I ever have expected you to love a common place fellow like me? But you will do me a great service if you will promise to remember that there is no effort I would not make to serve you."

"I will remember it," she says, holding out her hand to him. "I promise that if ever I need the service of a faithful friend, I will call upon you, and I shall be both proud and sorry to my dying day to have won the love of such a brave and generous heart as yours."

To his dying day George Proctor will carry the picture of her as she stands before him, uttering those words. He cannot speak, but he takes her hand and kisses it—careless what eyes may be upon him—and then they turn and go back to the others.

(To be continued.)

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