

Folly and Fate.

IN TWO INSTALMENTS.

CHAPTER I.

Confound her!

The anatomized 'her' was no creature of flesh and blood, but the elusive creation of Chandos Kain's brain.

He was a novelist by profession, by the double necessity of having to work for his daily bread, and the ever-recurring flood of fancies which crowded into his head, filling it so uncomfortably that he had no choice but to seek an outlet of some sort for them.

The outlet easiest and most natural to him was the rapid transfer of ink to paper through the medium of a pen; this alone gave him any real relief, and even this was of the most transitory description.

No sooner was one book finished than he felt impelled to begin another.

He had gone to Oversea with the firm determination to do no manner of work for at least a month.

In order to be utterly and unblushingly idle, he went into rooms instead of accepting an invitation to stay with friends, where he would have to exert himself to do a certain quantity of flitting and to be generally agreeable.

To do either, under compulsion, was hateful to his eyes; spontaneous flirtation came as naturally to him as scribbling.

He told himself—and others—that he did it in the interests of art, so as to maintain a perpetual freshness in his written love-scenes.

Perhaps this was really so.

To be spontaneously agreeable was, also, not difficult to Chandos Kain; but to smile and say pretty things to order was a task he declined to set himself at any time; for, whatever his faults, he was no hypocrite—at least, he did not think he was one.

The rooms he had chosen were situated quite two miles distant from the charming house occupied by the Willoughbys—the friends who had wanted him to visit them.

Their house was called Thurleston; it nestled in a little valley between two cliffs, close to the sea, and was as lonely as might be desired by a man and a woman who had not yet tired of each other's society in the close relationship of man and wife, though they had tried it for more than a year; but then, they were wise enough never to be entirely a dux for more than a week or two at a time.

Edgcliffe, the little cottage which had taken Kain's fancy as a temporary resting place, was at the other end of straggling, picturesque Oversea.

It was correctly named in so far as it stood near enough to the edge of the cliff to require of pedestrians in its immediate locality steady legs and a cool head on dark nights, for it was beyond the pale of civilization as represented by gas lamps, and electricity, too, was unknown at Oversea, except in the form of lightning.

Chandos Kain had been but one short week at Edgcliffe, but the Demon of Fancy already pounced on him.

Idea for a new story flowed in on him with each recurring tide.

His latest madness lay in the glowing belief that the tides were really responsible for the thoughts that filled his brain, and drove him to work in spite of his desire to be idle.

He started his story anyhow, scribbling anything his pen chose to write and at the end of half an hour, the call-boy shouted for the heroine of the piece to take the stage.

Now Chandos had been firmly persuaded in his own mind that his heroine was only awaiting that call to trip gracefully into public view.

He had decided on her personality and on her name, almost her character, though he had learnt from long experience that nothing is so variable as the character of apparently fictitious personages, whose dispositions and very thoughts might well be supposed to be directly controlled by the author of their existence, but who are in reality, completely under the influence of their own free will.

Having created them, the author is no longer responsible for their doings, and sayings, and thinkings.

This no doubt accounted for the fact that at the very beginning of her career in the world of fiction, Chandos Kain's new heroine insisted on saying 'No' when he had fully intended her to say 'Yes.'

Woman-like, she had no explanation to offer for her contrariness, but she stuck to her 'No' with an obstinacy not to be shaken.

Therefore—

'Confound her!' said Chandos Kain; and having so said, he threw down his pen in disgust, and raised his eyes to where the narrow path disappeared over the brow of the cliff on its way to Pointhead.

A woman, seemingly young, slender in figure and robed in white was leisurely making her way along the path.

Her back was turned to Oversea, and the foolish fancy came to the baffled novelist that she was his heroine in the flesh, deliberately deserting him, after doing her best to spoil his story.

'I'll go after her, and make her see reason!' he said to himself, snatching up his cap, and starting in pursuit, half in fun, and half in earnest.

At any rate, should the 'woman in white' prove good looking, and not too unapproachable, he might get some enjoyment out of the morning, in spite of his spoiled

story.

It is permitted, even to woman, to unbend a little at the seaside, and perhaps that is why Chandos Kain was regarded so calmly by the object of his pursuit as he came hurrying up to where she was seated on the stile, at the turn of the cliff-path, monarch of all she surveyed.

She slowly descended from her perch, and stood aside to let him pass.

But he made no attempt to pass. He was struck motionless by an amazing coincidence; for in this white-robed maiden he did, in very truth, recognise the heroine of his story.

He had seen her photograph a few days before in Mrs. Willoughby's drawing-room; had colored it to suit his mental fancy, and had instantly decided that she would 'do' for the next novel.

He now found that his coloring had been true to nature.

This girl was sufficient of a brunette to merit the name he knew her to have received at her baptism some twenty odd years before—the name of Olive; her eyes were a dark hazel, her nose was slightly retroussé, her mouth suggestive of nothing so much as kisses.

Kain felt tempted to kiss her then and there, as he raised his cap and found his tongue.

'May I introduce myself, Miss Granger? We shall meet at dinner this evening, and I came out on purpose to reason with you.'

'It will be sheer waste of time, Mr. Kain. Nobody ever succeeded yet in reasoning with me.'

'You know my name?' he asked rather superfluously, a delighted smile parting his lips.

'Your photograph stands next to mine on a bracket in Mrs. Willoughby's drawing-room,' she replied.

'Really! How kind of her to bracket us. Surely the fact affords sufficient excuse for us to dispense with formality and to become friends on the spot. Don't you think so?'

'I do. The more especially as I desire to go the way you are going, yet came to a standstill—or rather a sitstill—on this stile owing to a wholesome fear of tramps.'

'You don't look as if you could tear anything,' he observed, with a long glance into her uplifted eyes.

'You will change your mind when you know me better. But let us go on. I have bet Jack Willoughby a dozen pairs of gloves that I will lunch at Pointhead and send him a wire announcing the fact.'

'But Pointhead is a good six miles from here.'

'What of that? I have two hours and a half to do it in. He accused me of wearing shoes too tight to walk in. His wife simply ruins her feet by wearing sloppy things miles too large for her. She does it to please him. She has promised me another dozen of gloves if I convince him that it is possible to combine elegance and ease in one's foot gear. An eight mile walk in three hours in this weather was considered to be a fair test. I undertook to do it with a readiness born of temporary forgetfulness of tramps, and was just regretting my wager when I saw you coming along, to my infinite relief.'

'You mean you purposed paying me the compliment of inviting me to accompany you?'

'I did. I recognized you, you see. Do you mind coming?'

'I shall be delighted. Are you going to walk back?'

'Not if I know it. I arranged with Jack to meet the four o'clock train from Pointhead. Jack is my cousin, you know.'

'I did not know.'

'And I was at school with Amy; so we are chummy all round. What did you want to reason with me about?'

He explained, to her mingled amusement and gratification.

'You are putting me into a story, really? How delicious! And I have bothered you already! How more than delicious! But what have I done?'

'You have said "No," instead of "Yes," he told her, with a gloomy remembrance of his literary worry.

'Of course; I always say "No," on principle. How correctly you must have diagnosed my photo!'

'Why prefer "No," to "Yes," he asked.

'I'll explain, if it happens to fit the case in point. What do you want me to say "Yes" to?'

'To a proposal of marriage!'

'In the first chapter? Horrible! Why, it would involve you in a divorce case long before you got to the end No, really, Mr. Kain, if I am to end up respectable, you must not try to make me say "Yes" too soon.'

He found a great charm in listening to her, and watching her.

Her eyes danced wickedly, and smiles came and went around her tempting lips. 'I wonder how you would make love!' he said involuntarily.

'Make love! She turned a shocked face on him. 'I should never think of doing such a thing!'

He stammered an apology, which died a sudden death, as he caught the glance she bestowed upon him through her drooping lashes—a glance, accompanied by a murmur to the effect that she preferred to have love made to her, if he had no objection.

'I have not the slightest,' he declared emphatically. 'May I start now?'

'Don't be so stupid! You know what I mean. I make love, indeed! You must think me shockingly forward to imagine such a thing to be possible.'

'I should, perhaps, have said, instead—I wonder how you would respond to love-making?'

'My response must inevitably depend either on the amount of liking I happened to have for the man, or on my reasons for encouraging him.'

'Do you think it would be possible to give a reason—a little one would suffice for encouraging me.'

'I don't understand you.'

'Well, it's like this, you see: You are the heroine of my present story. I want, of course, to sketch you true to life. You tell me I have begun very well, by permitting you, sorely against my will, to say "No," when I wished you to say "Yes." Having begun so well, it would be a thousand pities not to continue on the same level. You agree with me?'

'Perfectly.'

'Thank you.'

'Well!'

A prolonged pause drew forth that questioning 'well?'

Kain replied to it by a tremendous sigh. 'It really is too much to ask on so short an acquaintance, and alter so informal an introduction.'

'Why not take courage from that same informality, and speak out like a man?' she suggested demurely.

'It's entirely in the interests of art,' he murmured. 'If only you would permit me to make love to you—I being the hero of my story, and devotedly attached to you; and if you would respond as the heroine—just in the interests of art, you know.'

'How much am I supposed to like you?' she asked smiling and blushing.

'Enough to enable me to look forward to eventually becoming the man in possession—of you,' he replied softly.

There was another long pause; on her side this time.

Then—

'There is a man, called Tom, who might object,' she said.

'All the better. I shall look upon him as a safeguard. He will be an obstacle in the way of my losing my head in reality over the contemplation of your many charms. I may as well confess to you that there is a woman, called Sylvia, who also might object.'

'Delightful! The idea is attractive—in the interests of art.'

'Only, look here, Mr. Kain—'

'My hero's name is "Chandos," he murmured, obeying, her, literally, in time to witness the warm suffusion of her cheeks at his words and tone.

'But that is your own name, surely?'

'I have given my own name unto my hero. My heroine is called Olive.'

He said this with so matter-of-fact an air that she could not decide if he had or had not known that she, too, was called Olive.

'You look as innocent as an angel,' she said, laughing a little. 'I was christened "Olive" I would have you know.'

'What a happy coincidence! I shall then in the person of my hero, enjoy the privilege of using your own name, and of hearing you use mine. Now, shall we begin darning?'

'No, no! that is too abrupt—far too abrupt. You must be content with glances this morning and perhaps a hand pressure at parting.'

'I perceive you have been well tutored,' he murmured, allowing himself considerable licence in the matter of his glance, since he was to be limited to that.

'Tom sees to all that,' she murmured back, keeping her countenance with some diffidence; then, laughing outright, she continued: 'Let us be conventional this morning and start "art" by-and-by, when you will have the felicity of taking me in to dinner. I feel that like, myself you are simply spoiling for a genuine flirtation. I have been starved for three whole days consequently I ought to be labelled dangerous.'

'I am to understand that it is three days since you saw the man called Tom?'

'Yes; he saw me off at Paddington on Tuesday. Amy is full of regrets at not having done better for me. You see, she depended on you for keeping me amused.'

'What fools we are, sometimes, when we insist on taking the reins of destiny into our own hands! I declined the invitation to Thurleston, because I thought I did not want to flirt or to amuse anyone.'

'And you have found out your mistake?'

'Within the last half hour. I shall take the liberty of changing my mind—and my habitation—without delay: I simply pine to be Mrs. Willoughby's guest.'

'Take my advice and stay where you are. I have a sad trick of tiring of people when I see too much of them. Think how disastrous it would be to have on your hands a heroine who refused to marry at all. It is a heroine's duty to marry, sooner or later, you know.'

'I am prepared to risk so alarming a disaster. If the worst comes to the worst I will admit Tom into my story. But I vow he will not survive the honeymoon.'

'Really you make me respect you, Mr. Kain. Your powers of intuition, shall we call it? are simply immense. I have



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assured Tom more than once that marriage with me would probably prove fatal to him. That was in order to gain time for reflection, you know. As your heroine I feel bound to let you know what is going on behind the scenes.'

'You are very good. It is delightful to meet with a nature so sympathetically attuned to—the real interests of art.'

'I assure you I am!' she averred, with equal fervour and vagueness. 'You will come over to Thurleston every day, won't you? In the character of my would-be fiancé, I mean.'

'Certainly. How long do you think it will be—or rather how short—before you can bring yourself to accept me?'

'Let me see. I shall be here a fortnight longer. You may safely venture to propose a day before I leave.'

He shook his head firmly.

'That won't do at any price. The experience I should gain of your responsive powers would be very insufficient. I think we had better, perhaps, let Nature—'

'I mean art—take its course. I shall throw myself so thoroughly into the part of wooer, in my desire to make my story a living thing, that I think I may safely be trusted to do the right thing at the right moment.'

'Ye—es?' She seemed rather doubtful on this point. Her next question was seemingly irrelevant. 'Is it permitted of me to ask the extent of Sylvia's claim on you?'

He hesitated almost imperceptibly.

'She calls herself my wife; but—with an untranslatable sort of smile, which yet was not a smile—'we do not live together—never, have, in fact.'

'Oh!'

He chuckled secretly as he saw he had effectually stopped further questioning.

In a tone of slight relief, she went on—'It really will help to pass the time very nicely, and I shall love to think that I am helping a real live author with his work. I hope the book will be a success.'

To herself she was saying—

'I wonder Amy did not tell me he was married? Perhaps, though, it is a secret, and he has only told me as a delicate reminder that I need not "play" in earnest. I like him for it; he shall not find his confidence has been misplaced.'

She ceased her soliloquy, in order to answer his query as to the number of guests at Thurleston.

'Only two besides myself. Neither Amy nor Jack cares for a lot of people to entertain. Do you know Lady Clevedon at all?'

'She is here—and a Major Rosedale.'

'Clive Rosedale! He's an old friend of mine. Lady Clevedon I knew slightly before her husband's death. She was a pretty girl then—about your age.'

'Well, now she is, I should say, a still prettier woman. Black suits her. That incorrigible little matchmaker, Amy, wants her to marry Major Rosedale: but he is far too devoted to Amy herself to think even of so charming a widow as Lady Clevedon—and she is openly indifferent to him.'

'Mrs. Willoughby still does a little flirting, then?'

'I don't believe she can help herself, any more than. What's bred in the bone comes out in the flesh.'

'How does Willoughby take it?'

'Like the sensible man he is. Half the unhappy marriages one hears of would be prevented if only people would trust each other more. Jack knows Amy loves his little finger more than any other man's whole body, and so he doesn't worry. In fact, he flirts himself; pretends to be espris with Lady Clevedon, to avenge himself for Major Rosedale's devotion to Amy. You can see how entirely I am out in the cold!'

'Let me have my way, and shift my belongings to Thurleston, and I will quickly alter that.'

'I feel almost tempted to say "Yes" but I fear your work would suffer. We should probably quarrel at the end of the second day, and where would you be then?'

'It takes two to make a quarrel. Take care! Give me your hand! This is an awkward bit!'

The warning came too late.

Olive Granger had been stepping along in her independent and slightly careless fashion, looking oftener at the sea sparkling in the sunlight than at the narrow pathway beneath her feet.

She trod on some loose earth, which gave way under her weight.

With a low cry of terror she caught at a bush growing at the edge of the path, tearing her hands slightly, but clinging for dear life until Kain, planting his feet firmly as near the verge of the cliff as he dared, lifted her from her perilous position to the safe shelter of his arms.

tion to the safe shelter of his arms.

He held her a moment, guessing by the shudder which ran through her that she was probably unable to stand alone.

Then he led her on some distance to where she could not easily look back and see the danger she had escaped.

The little episode served to sober Olive. Her wild spirits deserted her, and Kain had something more than a glimpse of another side of her manifold character.

This graver mood lasted until they reached Pointhead, where a judicious application of champagne once more brought the joyous light to the girl's hazel eyes and the smiles to her sweetly-curved lips.

But she was not unmindful of what he had done for her.

When they stood together in the quaint old station, waiting for their train, she raised grateful eyes to Chandos Kain, and murmured appealingly—

'Don't say anything about—that—to Jack, or any of them. They would talk of it for ever, and want me show them the place, and all that. Only, I shall never forget what I owe you.'

'What do you owe me?' he replied, smiling gently down at her. 'Escaped from a sprained ankle, perhaps. Well, I own it would not have been easy for me to carry you all the way from there to Pointhead. So, for both our sakes, I am glad it did not come off. I will not say anything about it.'

Something in his tone and glance increased the feeling of gratitude she had been cherishing towards him for the last two hours.

She smiled brightly into his steady eyes and became suddenly keenly conscious of feeling glad that she was alive.

They chatted gaily about half a dozen different things as the used up engine drew them feebly back to Oversea.

Jack Willoughby had been, waiting nearly half an hour for the overdue train, and, as the heat was very nearly tropical, he appeared in the last stage of exhaustion and far too much done up to experience more than a very small amount of surprise when he saw Kain and Olive emerge from a first class compartment, evidently on familiar terms with each other.

Somehow neither thought it worth while to explain, then or later, the actual origin of their sudden friendship—the contract on which Miss Granger had entered, in order to aid and abet the success of Mr. Kain's new book.

'We both happened to fancy a walk to Pointhead this morning. We met at the first style, and, our recognition being mutual, we joined forces,' explained the novelist easily. 'You can introduce us in due form now, Willoughby.'

'Not I!' declared the graceless fellow. 'If Olive will go careering over the country alone, picking up with all sorts of worthless characters, I decline to be held responsible.'

'Is he cross because he has lost his bet then?' cooed Olive teasingly. 'And I never once thought of my shoes, Jack—except to admire them. Mr. Kain will be my witness, that I was in no way fatigued when we reached Pointhead.'

'I refuse to accept his witness. A successful writer of fiction is bound to be an excellent fibber. You will drive back with us, Kain?'

'After that gross insult? Most certainly not. But I will come over later, and eat a big dinner at your expense.'

'As you will. Amy has vials full of wrath to pour on your doomed head, for refusing to dwell with us pro tem.'

'I'm not afraid of Amy, bless her! Tell her I am in a first rate flirting form.'

'All right. I'll give an eye to my pistols when I get back. Olive, dear, let me warn you against Chandos Kain. He is a regular Don Juan.'

'Thank you, Jack. I will beware of him. All the same, we have had a lovely time, have we not, Don Juan?'

Her eyes danced as she stooped from the seat in the high dogcart to which she had mounted, to give her fingers into Kain's keeping for an instant.

'Perfect!' he agreed. 'And, I trust, only the first of many perfect mornings to come. Au revoir!'

'Au revoir!' she echoed softly, with a backward glance, as Jack Willoughby took the reins and started his horse at the break neck pace for which he was noted.

CHAPTER II.

Major Rosedale's apparent devotion to his hostess was but a cloak to hide from the public view a serious wound to his vanity which he had received not many weeks before at the hands of Olive Granger.

They had become acquainted towards the end of the London season, and had enjoyed many a waltz together.

Then they had met at Scarborough, where Olive Rosedale followed up a month's very casual flirtation by a proposal of marriage, which was promptly, though courteously, cut short by Olive, she having neither anticipated nor desired such a climax to their growing intimacy.

He left Scarborough at once, mistaking surface-smarting for a severe and permanent hurt.

Imagining that he had been outraged in his deepest feelings, he encouraged thoughts of vengeance against the 'heartless flirt' who had betrayed him, which would never have been nourished in the heart of a true lover.

When, to their mutual discomfort, they met at Thurleston, Rosedale, in order to convince the 'heartless flirt' that she was already forgotten, plunged into a flirtation with Amy Willoughby, who, always ready for anything of that sort, met him half-way openly, and about as much in

(CONTINUED ON FIFTEENTH PAGE.)

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