

Literature.
FAR WOMEN.

BY MRS. FORRESTER.
CHAPTER XII.
THE SACRIFICE OF A LIFE.

Marie de Montolieu sat before her glass, engaged in profound reflection. She was going to a grand ball with Lady Vaynham that night, and was waiting for the maid to dress her.

"How sorry I am about Lord Poyns," she thought; "he had only known me—I could only have foreseen—I would have told him all honestly at once. But I could not act otherwise than I did, not knowing George really cared for me. All I could make myself in his love; it almost makes me selfish in my gladness. I wonder if Lord Poyns will be very sorry? He is so kind and good, and gentle, it would grieve me to think that he should suffer. Oh, how I wish I had told him I could not be his wife! He will think from my indecision I meant to marry him. And so I did before Mr. Vaynham spoke. I was not sure he cared for me. What will Lord and Lady Vaynham say? I think they will be glad for I am sure they love me, and do I not love them, too? My dear kind benefactors? I cannot imagine why George will not let me tell his mother. He says there is a very particular reason for silence on the subject just at present; but how, then, shall I account to Lady Vaynham for my rejection of Lord Poyns? I fear, as it is, she will be angry with me, for I know how much she liked him.

The lady's maid came in at this juncture, and Marie had no more time for reflection. But the next morning, after breakfast, she retired to her room, to write a letter to her mother. She had commenced to do so, and was sitting absorbed in thought, when a gentle tap was heard at the door, and Lady Vaynham entered.

"Well, my love," she said, cheerfully, "am I to congratulate you?"
"On what, dear Lady Vaynham?"
"Am I to salute you as the future Lady Poyns? I have not had a moment's leisure to ask you before, but I felt so certain of your answer, that the question was almost superfluous."

Mademoiselle de Montolieu colored deeply. "I do not intend to be Lady Poyns," she said, slowly.
"Marie! you are jesting; you would surely not be so foolish as to refuse such a splendid offer?"
"I am in earnest, dear Lady Vaynham; I am at this moment writing my refusal."

"Marie! what do you mean? Have you any idea of being doing? Do you remember that you have given Lord Poyns every encouragement, and that to refuse him would not only be ill-judged, but heartless in the extreme?"
"Do not say that," cried Marie, imploringly.
"But I must say it," said her ladyship, angrily. "It is impossible you can have changed your mind since we parted. Why did you not tell him then, frankly and fairly, that you did not intend to marry him?"

"And Lady Vaynham looked, as the lady felt very angry of my conduct upon your conduct, as a piece of abandoned coquetry."
Marie burst into tears. She longed to tell her friend everything, but she was under a promise of secrecy to George, and did not dare to break it.

"Then am I to understand," Lady Vaynham said at length, "that you are bent on refusing Lord Poyns?"
"Yes," answered Marie, in a low voice; and Lady Vaynham swept angrily from the room. Marie sat before her desk a long time, and it was only just as the lunch-bell rang that she finished and directed her letter. It ran as follows:

"DEAR LORD POYNES—When you read this letter, I fear you will think I have acted dishonorably, and with unparliamentary civility. When you asked me yesterday to be your wife, I promised to give you my time to consider your proposal. I had every intention of accepting an offer which did me so much honor, but since that time the whole current of my thoughts and feelings has changed. My first trust in you, and tell you the real truth? Ever since I first knew you, I have esteemed and liked you greatly. When you asked me to be your wife, I thought I could love you and be true to you, as I know you would have been to me. I will not conceal anything from you, because you are good and generous, and I believe you will not think worse of me for my confession. For weeks past I have loved one very dearly, who I could not be sure loved me in return. But yesterday he told me that he cared for me, and I have promised to be his wife. Dear Lord Poyns, if my conduct seems to you heartless, or wanting in delicacy, I throw myself on your generosity to excuse me, and believe me, I have no one who appreciates your goodness or nobleness of character more than

George?"
"Of all what? Really, my dear mother you must be a little more explicit," he answered, lightly, but with a very uncomfortable sensation at his heart.

"I went into the drawing-room just now," Lady Vaynham said, in clear, incisive tones, "and I saw you standing with your arm round Mademoiselle de Montolieu. That is what I want to know the meaning of."

George Vaynham comprehended at once that there was nothing for it but to tell his mother the truth. He paused a moment, and then, after a pause, "I love her very dearly, and I have asked her to be my wife."

"Indeed!" remarked Lady Vaynham, with some sarcasm. "Then am I to understand that you have pretended to like her, and that she has been so kind as to give you a piece of her mind?"

"Dear mother, do not be angry. When first I came I fancied I disliked your protégée, and for some time the feeling continued, until one day I accidentally overheard Lord Poyns's proposal to her. That showed me that my true sentiments were towards her, and I forgot everything, and I would have rejected him and to marry me."

"Then, in the indulgence of your passion, you forgot your father and mother, your debts, the position in which we stand—in short, everything but yourself."

"There was a bitterness in Lady Vaynham's voice which her son had never heard before.

"Mother," he said softly, "I love her so dearly."

"Listen to me, George," exclaimed his mother, angrily. "You know as well as I do that marriage with a penniless girl like Marie is out of the question. Relinquish her at once, and I do not doubt but that she will be anxious to bring back Lord Poyns to her feet."

"Never, mother!" replied George, firmly. "Nothing shall induce me to give her up."

"I have decided between love and duty, Lady Vaynham," she said, with natural calmness.

"God reward you for your generous sentiment," said Lady Vaynham, earnestly, bending forward to embrace her. But Mademoiselle de Montolieu drew back and left the room.

At eight o'clock, when Lord and Lady Vaynham had just left the house for the grand dinner at the embassy, Marie, with a breaking heart, was employed in packing her trunks. She was quite resolved on her course of action. At ten o'clock the carriage arrived, and she called a hackney-coach, and put Mademoiselle de Montolieu with her boxes into it, Marie drove to a remote part of London, where she was certain of not being discovered, and for a time lived on the proceeds of a few jewels which had belonged to her mother. Then she obtained a situation as governess, in a family going abroad, and subsequently married Sir Howard Champion's family, from which we have traced her.

Two years afterwards she learned that the Hon. George Vaynham had married Miss Cathcart. But she had heard of the bitter, unyielding feud, that remained between him and his mother, nor of the haunting remorse that never left Lady Vaynham until the day of her death.

CHAPTER XIII.
APPLIES OF THE DEAD SEA.

Most of the guests had left Hazell Court; and only Lord Harold Erskine and Mr. Le Marchant remained. It was the fourth day after the ball, and Lord Erskine had hidden away from the world to call on the Champions, while his friend had driven Mr. Hastings's team some ten miles distant, to make a call on a young lady he had been very anxious to marry. Errol had declined to accompany party either; he was in a very desultory, unsatisfactory state of mind, and found it difficult to resolve upon any particular course of action. He thought of nothing but his own affairs, and he was very glad to get his dilemma at home; and then his thoughts would return to Winifred, from whom they had been absent scarcely an hour during the last five days. He could not forget her, and he would—those sweet, tearful brown eyes haunted him day and night. Having once known and loved her, how could he reconcile himself to lonely days out of her presence? He would—how he would be content with absence from the one woman who had caused every pulse and nerve to vibrate with a new excitement. If she could only have been descended from a proud and old family like Flora Champion his happiness would have been complete.

At seven o'clock in the evening, Mr. Hastings strode towards the woods. He told himself he hoped he should not meet Miss Erskine, it would be so awkward, so unpleasant; and yet he went in the direction which she always took on her return from the cottage, and as the very first he knew she would be there. He stood for some minutes leaning over the gate watching, when she came, and he looked restlessly out for her, yet he was so conscious of his own position, that he was so glad she had not come, and yet in feverish fear lest she had already passed. The perversity of human nature is so curious a study, that people are very fond of acting a little play to themselves, and like Ecco, pretend to wish for the frustration of their dearest hopes. But when Errol saw Winifred coming along slowly and sadly through the woods, the play was at an end, and he could no longer conceal from himself the delight he experienced at seeing her again.

The next evening Lord and Lady Vaynham and Mr. Vaynham had been invited to a grand dinner at one of the foreign embassies. Mademoiselle de Montolieu had not been included in the invitation. Lady Vaynham had complained of headache early in the afternoon, and had gone to lie down about five o'clock. Marie went to her room with some tea. She always took it at that hour, and "How is your head now, dear Lady Vaynham?" she asked. "I have brought you some tea, thinking it might refresh you."

"Thank you," Lady Vaynham replied, coldly; "I am better—I do not need it."

Marie's eyes filled with tears, and she came up close to the couch where her protectress was lying.

"You are going away?" cried Winifred in a tremulous voice.

"Yes, I am going away from the country, home and friends, because, being near her, I cannot control my passionate feelings for her, I cannot tear my thoughts from her, or bring myself to look with love or admiration on any other woman."

The gate was open now, and Mr. Hastings had taken Winifred in his arms. "My darling," he whispered, "do you know who that woman is?"

Winifred was confused, surprised, ashamed, and yet with a tumultuous joy overshadowed her whole being. Then this fair tale was true, after all, and this splendid, gallant knight was at her feet in all truth and sincerity.

"Winifred," he said, passionately, "look into my eyes, and tell me that you love me."

She raised her beautiful shy brown eyes to his, and he bent down and kissed her so fondly, so tenderly, that she could no longer doubt his truth. And then there was a silence, a long silence, for the spell of the day-dream seemed too sweet to be broken by words.

In this moment of every happiness that Winifred had ever dreamed of was realized. Mr. Hastings loved her; she would be his wife; society would receive her, and she herself would be one of the gay world that she had so often envied. He had not deceived her; he had not been one of those heartless men of the world, against whom Madame de Montolieu had warned her; he was true and honest and true.

(To be continued)

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