

ONLY A FARMER'S DAUGHTER.

By
MRS. FORRESTER.

CHAPTER XX.

Mrs. Clayton was still a rich woman, although she did not, of course, possess more than a tithe of her husband's income. Still, that was enough to give her every luxury that she had been accustomed to, and to keep her in a manner befitting her station. She could not pretend any deep sorrow for the loss of a man who had been cruel, neglectful and almost brutal to her; but the time she had been absent from him had in a measure softened the harshness of the previous memories, and the sad fate which had overtaken him forbade in her forgiving heart the angry remembrance of past wrongs.

"Perhaps, aunt," she said, in a low, regretful voice, "if I had been more forbearing and less provoking to him he might have been different all the time."

Lady Marion looked up from her book. "It is always right, dear, to think kindly of people who are gone, and I should feel it wrong to speak against Francis Clayton now; but I cannot help thinking that no amount of goodness or gentleness could have touched a heart so bitter and cynical as his."

Mrs. Maxwell declined absolutely to be present at Winifred's wedding. As she was utterly indifferent now to the favor or disfavor of her relations, she did not trouble to make any excuse, but contented herself with saying she did not feel inclined to be one of the party.

"I always disliked the girl, and thought her intriguing," she wrote to her mother. "It would be a perfect farce for me to be present at her marriage. I have not the least sympathy with her success, although I admit she has played her cards well."

The wedding was none the less happy or magnificent for Mrs. Maxwell's absence; everyone pronounced it a very splendid affair; and this time the sympathies of all were enlisted for the bride and bridegroom were both young and handsome and happy. Sir Howard gave Winifred away, and her husband received her with infinite gladness and tenderness. All the farmers and villagers came round to see Miss Eyre, that they had known from a child, married.

At Hazell Court there were great festivities; dinners for all the tenants, and games and fireworks in the evening, and a real military band from London.

Captain le Marchant was best man, of course; Ada Fordyce chief bridesmaid, and Lord Harold Erskine was able to be present without suffering any pang of jealousy. He was to be married himself in a month's time. Madame de Montolieu had actually been persuaded to be present at the wedding.

"When we come back you will always live with us, dear madame," Winifred had said.

"Not yet, my love," the old lady answered. "Young people are best by themselves at first. I shall ask Lady Grace to keep me a little longer; and then, if in six months or a year's time you care to have me, I shall rejoice to come to you."

The spring had come round again, and Mr. and Mrs. Hastings were at Hazell Court. Mrs. Clayton was staying with them. She was herself again now—not so bright and sparkling, perhaps, as in the old days, but very sweet and good.

She and Winifred were sitting together in the green morning room as the twilight was coming on.

"I think the old Court is decidedly improved by the presence of a mistress," said Mrs. Clayton presently. "I always thought it charming—now it is perfect."

Winifred laughed a short, happy laugh. "Oh, do you really think so? It seems to me the place ought to have a much grander mistress than I. Fancy a girl brought up to a simple country life coming to such state and grandeur! I feel as if I ought to be like Lady Burleigh, and, instead of making myself so thoroughly at home, to pine away and die."

"It is a good thing Errol is not here to hear you, or he would be very angry at your saying such foolish things. If ever anyone was born with a thorough appreciation of the pomps and vanities of the world, it is you, I think. It makes me laugh when I remember how you used to preach to me about love in a cottage, and marrying the man you loved if he had not a shilling."

"And so I would have married Errol if he had been as poor as—"

"Be thankful, ma belle, that your love was not put to such a terrible test."

There was silence for a few moments, and then Mrs. Clayton spoke again, with a voice that betrayed some agitation: "Winifred, did you ever know how much I cared for Col. d'Aguiar?"

"I knew he cared a great deal for you, Fee."

"And you thought because I could not make up my mind to share poverty with him, that I did not love him?"

"Nay, Fee, I would not say that."

"Well, then," cried Mrs. Clayton, impetuously, "I tell you I loved him both before and after I married Francis Clayton—better after, perhaps, than before. I may as well confess the whole; I am not afraid of your repeating it. When I was so miserable we met again in London, and it seemed my only comfort to get his sympathy for my trouble. At last we parted, with the intention of not meeting again. I have never seen or heard

of him since. I can guess why he keeps away."

"You think he does not like to seek you because you are rich as well as free?" Winifred suggested.

Mrs. Clayton bent her head. "And I want you to do something for me," she said, after a pause.

"To ask him here, darling?" said Winifred, gently.

"Yes," answered Fee, simply. "Errol shall write to him at once. I know he likes him. I suppose he is in England?"

"I should think so," and Mrs. Clayton rose slowly and left the room.

Presently Mr. Hastings came in. "Errol!" said his wife.

"Yes, my pet."

"I want you to write at once and invite Col. d'Aguiar to come and stay."

"Do you, dear—why?"

"Never mind. You are not to ask any questions. I cannot tell you the reasons—at all events, not now."

He went up and kissed her.

"You seem to have an equal opinion of your husband's powers of divination and discretion," he said, laughing.

"Well, Errol, but will you?" pleaded Winifred.

"Of course. I will do anything you like," he answered. "It is too late to write to-night."

"Not if you send the letter over to Holton, Errol."

"What! is it so important as all that?"

"Yes, darling," she answered coaxingly, pushing him into a chair, and bringing the writing materials to him.

"Very well, little tyrant. But where is he?—what is his address?"

"O, Errol, I can't tell you," cried Winifred, looking blank. "Do you not know?"

"I don't, indeed. I believe his regiment has left Hounslow."

"Well, cannot you send it to his club?"

"Yes, I can do that; but you seemed in such a terrible hurry, and if he is not in town, the chances are he may not get it for days. Perhaps Fee knows."

"Now, Errol, how should she?"

"I don't know, darling. I always thought they were such great friends."

"Why, they have not met for months and months."

"Perhaps they might not like to meet, then," said Mr. Hastings, looking up at Winifred, and smiling a little maliciously.

"Had you not better consult Fee first?" and then Winifred fairly laughed, but would not be induced to say anything more on the subject. However, the letter was duly written and sent, and in three days' time the answer arrived. Col. d'Aguiar would have much pleasure in spending a few days at the Court, and Mr. Hastings might expect him the following day.

CHAPTER XXI.

When the Colonel came there was an embarrassment in his manner towards Mrs. Clayton; he was grave, kind and courteous, as though there had been no more than an ordinary friendship between them. He was resolved not to speak a single word of love to her. He felt her wealth to be a barrier between them, and could not bear to say what was in his heart for her, for fear any doubt of his great love should come between them—for fear any base thought should creep in and see a sordid desire in the renewal of his passion for her.

The last few months had been very painful to him. When he heard of Francis Clayton's sudden death, a feeling that he was ashamed of came over him. He was not glad, not actually glad—nay, he felt a kind of pity for the man who had been cut off in the prime of his life, selfish and ill-spent though it had been; but he could not forget that Fee was free. He felt that she must be the first to hold communication with him. Would she do so? Did she still care for him, and had she believed truly in the unselfishness of his renunciation of her?

Mrs. Hastings was by no means satisfied with the progress of the affairs. Instead of the first natural reserve between Col. d'Aguiar and her friend being dissipated it seemed to grow stronger each day. They avoided, above all things, being left alone together. Winifred wanted to help them; she felt certain they cared for each other, and, besides, women in the first flush of a happy marriage are always inveterate match makers.

"Errol," said his wife one day at lunch, "I want to drive you over to the Manor this afternoon. I am going to see grandpapa, and he has grown so fond of you he never likes me to go without you."

"You forget, dear," replied Mr. Hastings, "we cannot be so uncourteous as to leave our guests."

"How stupid and provoking men are!" Winifred thought, pettishly. She looked up at Col. d'Aguiar pleadingly.

"You will excuse him, will you not?"

"I was intending to ask permission to ride over and call on Lord Lancing this afternoon," he answered, fabricating a polite fiction for the occasion.

"And I have a headache and do not care to go out," said Mrs. Clayton.

"Then we shall go over to the Manor as you wish, Winifred. Have you ordered the ponies?"

"No, please ring the bell, and say 3 o'clock."

you ride this afternoon?" and the two gentlemen went off together.

"Fee," said Winifred, suddenly, "you and Col. d'Aguiar are very provoking."

"How, Winifred?"

"You are so strange and distant to each other. Why do you not let him see you care for him?"

"I do not think he cares for me any longer," Mrs. Clayton answered, despondingly.

"How can you be so blind, Fee? You must know what he feels. Is it not quite natural that he should hesitate to remind you of the past now that you are rich?"

"But, Winifred, a woman cannot speak first."

"Of course you cannot ask him to marry you, but you can let him see that you are not utterly indifferent to him."

Mrs. Clayton made no answer.

"It is so tiresome of him to go out," continued Winifred, presently.

"And defeat your intentions, little match maker," added Fee, looking up.

When Errol and his wife had started Mrs. Clayton took her book to the green-room and began to read. Col. d'Aguiar came to fetch a letter he had written in the morning. A sudden thought crossed Fee's mind that sent the blood rushing over neck and brow and made her heart beat in great throbs.

"Col. d'Aguiar," she said, with a voice almost inarticulate with nervousness.

"Yes, Mrs. Clayton."

"Are you really going out?"

"I am just starting for Holton."

"Won't you stay with me? I shall be so dull all alone."

He hesitated for a moment.

"If you really wish it I will."

"Of course I wish it or I should not ask," Fee responded, a little petulantly.

"Then I will go and send the groom back to the stables." And he left the room.

Mrs. Clayton was excessively uneasy in her mind. She could not form the least resolve what she should say to him when he returned.

"You will not thank me for spoiling your ride," were her first words to him.

"I would much rather be here. I only proposed riding to Holton because I thought Mrs. Hastings was anxious for her husband's company."

"Are they not devoted?" sighed Fee.

"I never saw a man fonder of a woman. I do believe he fancies there is no one like her—so graceful, so amiable, so clever."

"That is as it should be, is it not?" asked Col. d'Aguiar, smiling.

"Of course. He intends her to make quite an impression this season. He has taken a mansion for three months and an opera box, and I know he means her to have her handsomest carriage and horses in London. Fancy a woman having all that and a handsome husband whom she loves besides! And there were tears in Mrs. Clayton's eyes.

"She is very sweet-mannered. I think she deserves her happiness."

"I am sure she does," responded Mrs. Clayton, warmly. "She would have married him just the same if he had been poor. She was not like me, Col. d'Aguiar."

"You forget how differently you were brought up," he exclaimed, eager to defend her from any imputation, even though it came from her own lips. "Poverty would have been a terrible hardship to you, who had been used all your life to luxury."

"It is very generous in you to excuse my selfishness," Fee said, softly, "since you suffered by it. Did you suffer?" she asked, with a quick alteration of mood.

"Hardly," she added, with the slightest tinge of bitterness, "or you would not have been so ready to give me up."

It was Col. d'Aguiar's turn to feel hurt and bitter now.

"I believe women never give men credit for real unselfishness," he said. "A woman has more faith in the passion that sacrifices than in the love that spares her."

"Col. d'Aguiar," said Mrs. Clayton, with bright tears standing in her eyes, "I would give the world to know if you left me because you really loved me."

"My love could have little worth for you," he answered, sadly, "if a doubt of my motive could have found room in your heart."

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He didn't have a dollar; he didn't have a dime. His clothes and shoes were looking just as though they'd served their time. He didn't try to kill himself to dodge misfortune's whacks. Instead, he got some ashes and he filled five dozen sacks. Then, next he begged a dollar. In the paper in the morn he advertised tin pelish that would put the sun to scorn. He kept on advertising, and, just now, suffice to say, he's out in California at his cottage on the bay.—The Lyre.

Confession.

"Do you make much out of your library work?" asked the inquisitive person.

"Yes, replied the man who scribbles occasionally, "much more out of it than I do in it."

Canada Is Building Railroads.

The number of miles of railroad completed in the Dominion of Canada is 18,868, an increase of 574 miles over the previous year.

The Inference Obvious.

District Attorney Jerome tells of a prisoner recently brought to a Harlem police station whose condition was so uncleanly that he was advised by the desk sergeant to take a bath.

"What!" exclaimed the hobo, indignantly, "me go into the water?"

"Certainly; you need it. How long is it since you had a bath?"

The hobo grinned. "I never was arrested before."—New York Times.

He Knew One.

"I have here," said the industrious book agent, "a volume which is especially helpful to business men. I'm certain it would benefit you if"—

"Can you mention any businessman it has benefited?" broke in the skeptical one in the office chair.

"Sure. There's me, for instance. I get a big commission."—Kansas City Journal.

Woman Given Piece of Honor.

Mrs. James R. Hopley of Bucyrus, O., is the only woman who has been given a pass upon the centennial program commemorating the 100th anniversary of the admission of Ohio to the union. The theme of her address will be "The Value of Good Women in Influencing Civilization." Mrs. Hopley is a former president of the Ohio Federated Clubs.

Great Demonstration.

"They say when the great pianist played in this town the people went wild," remarked the comedian.

"They did the same when I played," remarked the young lady who blows the cornet.

"Were they demanding that you come back?"

"No, they were demanding their money back."

Not So Warm.

"I say, Miss DeWitt," remarked young Supleigh, "your wondrous beauty sets me bawin on fish, doncher know?"

"Never mind, Mr. Supleigh," replied Miss DeWitt, "the conflagration will be too insignificant to necessitate the calling out of the fire department."

The Camera's Eccentricities.

"All nature is beautiful," said the enthusiast.

"I used to think so," answered the young man with discolored fingers.

"But since I took up amateur photography I begin to have my doubts."—Washington Star.

Queen Alexandra's Epigram.

"It is a pity," said Queen Alexandra to the late Bishop of London, one day, "that women are not as devoted to the birds in the air as they are to the birds in their hats."

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