

Dr. Maria Montessori

from me, your mother won't like it! If you are through with that cup, I will take the things back," and nonchalantly shying the bits of the broken plate into the bushes, he went toward the refreshment tent, saying to his host, Mrs. Jenks-Smith, who was inquiring for Sylvia: "Yes, she is yonder in the second arbour. I've taken her some tea, for she's quite done up; that beastly overland trip home was too much for her in the first hot weather."

Consequently the warm-hearted Lady of the Bluffs was naturally prepared to find Sylvia sick and faint, and urged sending her home, where she could slip in and get to bed unobserved, which was the one thing that the girl most desired. Also this shrewd lady was wise enough to give no sign, even though she drew her own conclusions, when on turning to leave the arbour she saw a bit of the broken plate lying on the ground at the opposite side near where a point of the rustic work had torn a shred from Sylvia's mull drapery as she had pulled herself away.

By the time that Sylvia had gained her room the warm twilight sky had been transformed to a silver lake by the moon, but she neither enjoyed its beauty nor heard the music that was beginning to come from the rose garden above, as well as the tea-room below stairs. She sat by the window, deaf to all outside things, with only one thought in her mind; she would gladly have buried the occurrence of the arbour, if it were possible, but as it was, she must tell her mother, as now, that his motive was made plain, Monty Bell, as a matter of course, could no longer come to the house. Finally she went to bed and slept from sheer exhaustion, never for a moment doubting that her mother would take her view of the matter. Presently the French maid crept in and closed the blinds, wondering why Mademoiselle often seemed to take pleasure so sadly, and appeared older than Madame, her mother, and then, feeling at liberty, hurried down gayly to dance on the back porch.

Mrs. Latham slept late the next morning, and at eleven o'clock had only finished looking over her mail without yet touching her breakfast, when, without waiting for an answer to her knock, Sylvia entered. Her mother looked up in some surprise, for she did not encourage running in and out at all hours, or any of the usual intimacies between a mother and grown daughter who are companions. In fact she did not even ask Sylvia to sit down, or if she was ill, though her pallor was very apparent, but merely raised questioning eyebrows, saying, "What is it?" as she turned her attention to some legal-looking documents in her lace-decked lap.

Chilled to the heart Sylvia seated herself in a low chair by her mother, so that she need not raise her voice, and twisting her hands nervously, told what had happened in as few words as possible, much as if she had repeated them over and over until they were learned like a lesson.

Mrs. Latham's cold gray eyes at first snapped viciously, and then grew big with wonder as Sylvia ended by saying, "I should never have spoken of this to any one, and tried to forget, but you would think it strange that Mr. Bell should stop coming here—and—"

"Think it strange?" said Mrs. Latham, speaking harshly and rapidly, a thing she rarely did. "Do you know what I think of you? That you are the most absolute little fool I ever imagined. You not only refuse a man who could make your social position secure, but rant and get into tantrums over the compliment he pays you, and call it an 'insult,' exactly as your canting grandmother Latham might have done. I've no patience with you; and if you think that this nonsense of yours shuts the door in Monty Bell's face, you are wholly mistaken."

"While we are upon this subject of divorce that seems to shock you so, I may as well tell you what you will not see for yourself, and your father appears to have been too mealy-mouthed to explain,—we have agreed to separate. No need of your getting tragic, there are no public recriminations on either side, no vulgar infidelity or common quarrelling, everything quite amicable, I assure

you. Simply we find our tastes totally different, and have done so for several years. Mr. Latham's ambitions are wholly financial, mine are social. He repelled and ignored my best friends, and as we were in every way independent of each other, he has been wise enough to avoid possible and annoying complications by standing out of my way and making it easy for me to legalize the arrangement and readjust myself completely to new conditions."

"But what of Carthy and me?" gasped Sylvia, in a voice so choked and hollow that the older woman hesitated, but for a single instant only. "Have neither you nor father thought of us? Where do we belong? Where is our home? Can people who have once loved each other forget their children and throw them off so? Does God allow it? You must have cared for father once, for I remember when I was a little girl you told me that you called me Sylvia, to have my name as nearly like father's—Sylvester—as possible. Have you forgotten it all, that you can do this thing, when you say in the same breath that father has done no evil?"

"Don't be tragic, Sylvia, and rake up things that have nothing to do with the matter. As to your brother, it was your father's foolish severity about a card debt, and insisting upon placing him away from me, this is primarily responsible for the divorce, not any wish of mine to exile Carthy. And you ask where your home is, as if I had turned you out, when you have just refused an offer that any unmarried society woman who can afford it, would clutch."

Sylvia sat silent, looking blindly before her. Her mother waited a moment, as if expecting some reply, and then continued: "Now that the matter is virtually settled, I suppose in a few days the papers will save me the trouble of announcing it. Under the circumstances, I shall rent the Newport house for the season, as I have had several good offers, and go abroad for two or three months on the continent, so that before my return the town house will be re-decorated and everything will be readjusted for a successful winter. You had better take a few days before deciding what to do. You can, of course, come with me, if you are not sick of travel, or go to your father, who is ready to make you a handsome allowance; though you will find that awkward at present, as he is moving about so much. If you choose to feel aggrieved just now, you might persuade your dear, prim Miss Dorman to either stay here with you or take that little furnished house that is to rent on the lower road, if you prefer that form of discomfort they call simplicity. You needn't decide now; take time," she added genially, as if she was doing all that could be asked.

When she ceased speaking, Sylvia, with bowed head, rose and quickly left the room.

Then Mrs. Latham gave a sigh of relief that the interview was over, threw the papers into a bureau drawer, called to the maid, who had been all the while listening in the dressing room, to prepare to arrange her hair, and, taking the chances that Sylvia would keep her room, at least for some hours, wrote a hasty note to Monty Bell, inviting him to luncheon.

Meanwhile, Sylvia, instead of going to her room to cry, took her hat and crept out into the lane that led to the woods. She must be quite away by herself and gain time to think. This was a terrible sort of grief that could neither be kept secret nor halved by sympathy, but must be worn in the full glare of day. Her heart condemned her mother wholly, and she understood why her father kept the silence of shame,—to whom could she turn? As she gained the woods, and throwing herself down on a soft bed of hemlock needles, closed her dry, burning eyes, two people seemed to stand side by side and look at her pityingly.—Lavinia Dorman and Horace Bradford,—and mentally she turned toward one and shrank from the other. In Miss Lavinia she saw her only refuge, but between herself and Horace the shadow of his upright, mother seemed to intervene. What could they think of her mother playing at Geisha girl in her own home at the very hour of its wreck?

(To be continued.)

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