

MARJORIE DURANT.

(Continued.)

CHAPTER IV.

"Borthwick," said Dr. Gresham one morning when he came in to luncheon, "do you feel inclined to make yourself useful, because, if you do, there is a job ready for you."

"What is it?" asked Hugh.

"Cautious man! They want volunteers on the Relief Fund Committee; I mean men who will help distribute money and tickets with their own hands, keep accounts, and so on. Everyone is willing to do the talker-talker—good Lord! what a lot of foolish chatter goes on!—but money is wasted in paying people to do the work. The men who have the time won't give it; and the men who would give it have not got it. What do you say?"

"I shall be here such a little while I don't think I should be much use, but if temporary assistance will be any good, why, I am their man."

"Little while! Nonsense! Now I have got you I don't mean to part with you in a hurry. Don't let me hear anything more of leaving, till after the New Year is in, at any rate. So that is settled; and if you come with me to-morrow I will introduce you to Mr. Bradley, and he will tell you all about the work."

Dr. Gresham was very glad Hugh had consented, for he was anxious to keep him in the town as long as possible. Hugh was changed, his friend saw, and he was not sure that he liked the change. The boyish hopefulness was gone, and there was a cynical flavor about his speech which betrayed the depth of the old wound. He often, as it were, got outside his old self, and all that old self typified, and with keen analysis and bitter words held it up to the scorn of the new self, lightly laughing at the doctor because he would not join him.

"This is a disappointed man, crammed full of world wisdom. I liked the boy better. Now, when he has the ball at his feet he thinks it scarcely worth stooping for. Marjorie did the mischief; perhaps it is not too late for her to repair it," thought the older man.

But the weeks went by, and Borthwick remained a sealed book as far as Marjorie was concerned. He had seen her many times since their meeting on the common, and the first inevitable restraint having worn off, thanks partly to Theo's tact and determination, they were apparently very good friends, which was just what the doctor complained of. Of course it was impossible to guess what were Marjorie's feelings, but the doctor did her more justice than Hugh, and was quite convinced she would never marry him unless she loved him.

But Borthwick made no sign that she was any more to him than any other girl, and his friend began to think his first and only attempt at inveigling a man into the matrimonial noose, which he had himself escaped, was destined to be a failure. He forgot that Hugh was no longer a love-sick boy, to rush to any friend who would listen to his raving, but was a man who had knocked about in the world till he was little likely to wear his heart upon his sleeve and pipe his love-song to the gaping crowd. Hugh loved Marjorie as much as ever, but it was in a different fashion. If he could have believed that she loved him he would have been very happy, but the idea of Marjorie marrying him for the sake of the home he could give her, filled him with dread, and effectually closed his lips. The glamor was gone, and in the place of the ideal creature he had worshipped he saw a lovable, but faulty and changeable girl, who had followed any caprice of the moment without thought of what the cost might be to others. True, under the iron hand of sorrow she had developed into a brave and patient woman, who commanded his admiration; but it was impossible for him to guess how much or how little Mr. Damer's desertion had had to do in making her the grave, tender hearted woman he could scarcely believe was the same as the old careless, sparkling Marjorie.

When he was away he had felt an irresistible impulse to return to Draybridge; now he was there he almost wished he had not yielded to it.

One afternoon Marjorie was curled up in an armchair watching Theo going through the thrilling performance of trying on a new bonnet. It was Saturday, so Marjorie was at liberty to spend her time in whatever way she thought fit, and the Durells took care that that time should be devoted to pleasant idleness. She had been sitting by the fire with a book on her knees, reading a little and dreaming a little, till the arrival of Theo's millinery aroused her.

"Well," said Theo, surveying herself complacently in a glass, "will it do?"

"No," answered Marjorie promptly. "Oh, there is nothing the matter with it as a bonnet," she continued, checking Theo's exclamation of dismay. "It's what I call a highly respectable bonnet, but it won't do for you."

"Thank you," said Theo, sweeping a low curtsey.

Marjorie waved this aside and went on:

"You must not have strings."

"Oh, I must have strings."

"You will not have strings; and you will have another bonnet built twenty years younger at least. Theo," Marjorie exclaimed, so suddenly that Theo started, "I do believe you are trying to dress up to Dr. Gresham! Now, it is no use, twenty-seven must not marry forty-six."

For a moment Miss Durell's usual equanimity almost failed her, and it was in a tone approaching nearer to anger than she had ever used to Marjorie that she answered:

"Don't talk such utter nonsense, Marjorie!"

The two girls had been so busy talking that they had not noticed the sound of the knocker, and before Marjorie could answer, Dr. Gresham and Hugh were shown into the room.

Marjorie was the first to recover her wits.

"You are just in time to give an opinion," she said. "We are having a dress rehearsal, and are calculating the effect of Theo's new bonnet on the women in church to-morrow; now do you think it will fill them with envy hatred, and malice? I am afraid not."

"Marjorie, Marjorie!" cried Mrs. Durell, who entered the room in time to hear the last part of the girl's speech.

"Well, dear, you know it is true, though not generally acknowledged, that women only dress to make other women miserable."

"I feel humbled," said Dr. Gresham. "I really thought ladies put on pretty things to please me—not me individually, but as representing the enemy."

"Never harbour so conceited a notion again," said Marjorie. "But you haven't given an opinion yet, and mind it is to be a candid one."

"I like it very much," said the doctor stoutly.

Marjorie looked at him disapprovingly, and telegraphed in dumb show to Hugh that he was not to say the same.

A pang shot through Hugh's heart as he thought how in old days he had read the merest flicker of Marjorie's eyelids, or the slightest wave of her hand, and here he was following her lead again.

"Miss Durell lends a grace to the bonnet which it does not possess in itself," he said.

"Two for and two against," said Theo. "Mother, yours will have to be the casting vote, but we will postpone the decision till Monday."

"And allow the congregation to attend to the service undisturbed to-morrow," said Mrs. Durell. "Marjorie, dear, will you ring for some tea?"

Marjorie did as she was asked, and then turning to Hugh, she said:

"How are you getting on with your Relief Fund work, Mr. Borthwick?"

"Very well," answered Hugh. "We want more men to sift cases before they are relieved, though. I found a number of sturdy, idle vagabonds, who have simply loafed about all their lives, were presenting themselves as working men out of employment and getting the relief money, and in some cases men had actually refused work, preferring to live on the charity intended for the unfortunate."

"What did you do?" asked Mrs. Durell.

"Stopped the supplies at once, told the loafers to live as they had lived before, and the others do the work which was offered to them."

"They are a rough lot at Paradise, are they not?" said Mrs. Durell dubiously.

"However did the place get such a name?" asked Theo.

"I have often wondered," said the doctor. "Any place more unlike Paradise it would be hard to imagine. A narrow, dirty street about a mile in length, with still dirtier lanes crossing it, leading to different factories; black mud and refuse ankle deep in winter, black dust and refuse ankle deep in summer, and sulphurous clouds of smoke overhanging the place all the year round; that is Paradise. The man who named it must have done so in a wild fit of waggishness."

"And the people?" said Theo.

"Even where they are not poor they seem to have the same inborn love of dirt and equalor."

"You see they have no aim, no ambition to excel in anything. They have taken for their motto, 'Anything will do.'"

"A man or woman with no aim in life is already half dead," said Theo.

"Shall I meet you at Mrs. Hastings' on Tuesday?" asked Hugh of Marjorie, as if tired of the discussion.

"Oh, no," she answered quickly; "but Theo is going."

"Yes, I'm going," said Theo. "But how I hate a musical evening!"

"You don't care about music?" said Hugh questioningly.

"Vocal, yes; instrumental, only when I am in the mood for it. It always amuses me to see the shocked look of the musical gushers when I say so; they seem to think that there is something wanting in me. Half the women I meet don't know the difference between 'Frondos Agrestes' and 'Sartor Resartus,' and could not tell a Botticelli from a Turner, or Hook from Burne-Jones; now I consider that very ignorant, but I do not tell them so. Musical people seem to have a monopoly of rudeness."

"Theo means she does not care for all classical music," explained Mrs. Durell.

"Even my own mother feels it necessary to apologise for me because too much Handel and Beethoven sends me to sleep," said Theo, with a comic look of resignation.

"Hugh," said the doctor, as they were walking home, "I advise you to be careful down Paradise way; those men of whom you were speaking will not bear you any good will."

"Oh, they are all right; I am not afraid of them attacking me."

"It is as well to be prepared; they are a rough lot."

"Yes," said Hugh absently, his mind far away.

Instinctively the doctor seemed to know his thoughts, for his next remark came like a comment on what Hugh was thinking.

"Miss Durell hit the right nail on the head when she said a man with no aim is only half alive."

"I wonder whether I was the nail meant," said Hugh dryly.

"Hugh," broke out Dr. Gresham impetuously, "you don't appear to care for anything now; you are far too *blase* for your age. If you go on, you will develop into a selfish, cynical old bachelor. Forgive me if I speak plainly."