

FORCING FATE

BY EDITH M. WHALLEY.

The thing is impossible, Beatrice, quite impossible—

It is nothing of the kind, Madge, if only you will do as I ask you. The scheme must succeed.

Oh! Don't say the scheme would not be a success, it is the doing of the whole thing that I object to, Beatrice, if it got me out of here to show ourselves in society again as long as we lived.

But it never will get out of here, how should it? When we are once married you may be sure Eric won't rush around telling his friends, and I don't think we shall mention it," she added, laughing daintily.

As Beatrice Vane spoke she crossed the pretty morning room in which she and Madge Lester were sitting, and kneeling by her friend's chair she continued, all the laughter gone out of her voice.

Oh! My dear, if you only knew what it means to me you would never think of refusing to help me. Why! If you were in my place I would go through fire and water for your happiness.

Madge put her arms round the impulsive girl by her side and kissed her tenderly. The two women made a beautiful picture, the one sitting, the other kneeling at her feet. The sun, which was shining brightly into the room, lit up the two fair heads and cast a halo round them, as if it loved them. They are strangely alike, so much so that strangers always take it for granted that they are sisters. All resemblances, however, with their appearance, for two natures more dissimilar it would be difficult to find. Madge Lester is a bright, capable woman, well pleased with herself and her surroundings, sufficiently intelligent to be interesting, with an even, amiable disposition, a capacity for deep affection, and a sincere belief in God. The type of woman of which the true wife and mother is made, for those having lived the world is always the better.

Beatrice Vane is a mixture, as complex as she is brilliant, full of fire and restless activity, with latest powers and capabilities, when, up to the present time, have lain dormant for lack of opportunities. The motherless child of an indigent father, her life had been one continued round of pleasure, and when, in the summer of her eighteenth year, her father died, leaving her, instead of the large fortune she had always been led to expect, merely a small annuity, she had surprised her acquaintances by the cheerful alacrity with which she had accepted her change of circumstances. At the time of Mr. Vane's death Madge had gone to her friend and begged her to share her home, but Beatrice had said, in her quick, decided manner:

"Don't ask me that, dear, as you love me, I must be independent or die," and there the matter had ended.

A year later Beatrice surprised Madge by coming walking into the room where she was sitting in her beautiful country home on the shores of Lake Winnebago, and her surprise deepened into consternation as Beatrice unfolded the scroll on which she had come. In the emphatic, slightly detestful manner which Madge was no accustomed, Beatrice recounted how Eric Hamilton, the man with whom she was deeply in love, and who although he loved her when her father died and he discovered she was as poor as himself, fearing to ask her to share his poverty, knowing how unkindly her bringing up had been to the makings of a poor man's wife, had left her, not deserting her, but she had been, having discovered her lover's whereabouts, now implored Madge to go to the place where he was staying and to induce him, by fair means or otherwise, to ask her to marry him, and then, on the wedding day Beatrice, taking advantage of her personal resemblance to Madge, to change places with her friend and herself marry Eric Hamilton, thus making her lover as rich as she had been to gain his forgiveness for her deception, and to live happily ever after, as the audacious girl stood up her rapid sketch of her mad scheme.

If I were sure the furtherance of your plan would be for your happiness, Beatrice, I would gladly consent to help you. Madge continued, "but I see nothing but humiliation and pain for you at the end of it, and that is why I say the thing is impossible."

Beatrice rose to her feet, her face flushed with excitement, her voice trembling with eagerness.

Oh! Madge, why will you not understand? I tell you he loves me, I know he does! Why, only the day before father's death he had begun to propose to me, when we were interrupted by Mrs. Fulham calling upon me. Think of it, Madge! My whole life revolved by the chance visit of a mere acquaintance. That is, she added hastily, "unless you will help me to force fate and undo the evil that woman unconsciously did."

But Beatrice, surely, if this man loved you, he would never have allowed your altered circumstances to have prevented him asking you to be his wife.

How could he, a beggarly artist, ask me a poor woman, to marry him? Beatrice retorted, almost angrily. "His of course thought me quite incapable of making a poor man's wife, and so he went away, and I have never heard of him since, until yesterday, when Mrs. Casson wrote to me, and in her letter mentioned that 'Mr. Hamilton, the artist, was staying at the lake for the summer months, painting some delightful local scenery.' It was then—that night, I walked out, feeling unable to sleep, that the idea came to me that he should be induced to propose to you, and that we would change places on the wedding day. Once his wife, Madge, I will soon convince him how capable I am of helping him to the success which must be his one day. Oh! say you will do it, dear. For pity's sake, say you will do it, for I think my stretched impudence will drive me mad."

With a bitter cry, almost like an animal in pain, she flung herself into a chair, and burying her head in her arms on the table beside her she burst into tears.

Madge walked over to the weeping girl, and gently stroking the bowed head, she once more tried to show her impulsive friend how altogether impracticable her wild plan was. Beatrice choked down her tears, but did not raise her head until Madge remarked:

"I cannot understand a girl of your spirit caring for a man who you feel so sure will ask me to marry him simply because I am a rich woman."

Then she turned quickly, and pushing back the hair from her tear stained face, she said lustily:

"No! I do not think he will do that. Life is an ambitious man, but he is not a mad. He must like you—must resemble me so strongly. And having once made up his mind that marriage with me is impossible he will soon imagine he cares for you—O, don't ever, Madge! I know to a woman like you such a man appears contemptible, but I am content to realize, even while I love him, that he is only a man, and love is not, to him, all that it is to us women."

Madge passed her hand wearily over her eyes. The scene was becoming almost more than she could bear. As a last argument she faltered:

"But suppose he has ceased to care for you?" Beatrice laughed, almost scornfully—she had no love for twenty-five years without knowing the power over men, especially this man of whom they are speaking.

"Help me to become his wife," she said, "I know he will love me—O! Madge, he must love me—he will love me. Think what men, and women, too, have dared for those they love. Surely I, too, may try my luck for a stake which means more than life itself to me."

As she spoke she stood erect, her whole frame lifted to an almost ethereal intensity with the love light triumphant with a passion which thrilled the colder woman as she listened and made her throw her better judgment to the winds. Taking her friend's hands in hers she exclaimed:

"Perhaps you're right. And come what may I will do all in my power to help you to become the wife of Eric Hamilton. Surely he must be other than man if he fails to return such love as yours."

With a happy laugh Beatrice kissed her friend, and then the two girls sat and talked over their plans until the sun had sunk to rest and the shadows crept into the room and warned them day was done.

Having now given her promise Madge Lester was not the woman to shirk the consequences. Before a week had passed she had taken a pretty cottage at Lake Geneva and had moved into it, taking with her a number of servants and her carriage and horses, feeling it was part of the game she was playing to let it be known that she was a wealthy woman. She also invited an elderly and partially deaf aunt, named Miss Knox, to spend the summer with her and play properly when necessary. This equipped, she, figuratively speaking, sat down and waited for events to evolve themselves.

Soon the cottagers called upon Miss Lester and her aunt, and Mrs. Payne gave a pleasant dinner party in their honor, at which function Madge was introduced to Eric Hamilton. She thought he gave a slight start, he looked at her, and she felt the color rush into her face as she returned his polite acknowledgments. Her hostess hurried her on to present her to other guests, and for the rest of the evening she had no chance of again speaking to him. She noticed, however, that, although a comparative stranger, he seemed to be a general favorite with every one there, and she was not surprised, for not only was he a distinctly handsome well bred man, but he was also a brilliant conversationalist, and as Madge listened to him she began to realize how this man had so completely won the love of her impulsive friend, Beatrice Vane.

After that evening she met him almost every day, either at picnic parties, yachting, or other social occasions, to which they were both invited. At the beginning of their acquaintance Madge had felt a deep contempt for this great, handsome man, who had run away from the girl he loved rather than share his "little all" with her. She had, in conversation with him on one occasion, led up to the subject of love matches between poor men and women, and he had expressed himself so strongly upon the selfishness of most of them, they pretended to love into such a life of care and trouble that she had come to think Beatrice was right, and her tragic scheme was indeed the only way in which she could ever become this man's wife. The two soon became excellent friends, and Madge decided that the task of gaining Eric Hamilton's affections would be no mean and hopeless task for one. That Eric both admired and liked Madge, and that he was a natural friskness which Madge found delightful to listen to.

Madge did not attempt to explain to herself why writing to Beatrice had become so difficult. With the character she had assumed, she had submerged her own self temperamental, and with such abandonment, wholly unlike her true self, she lived for each day as it came, and left the morrow to take thought for itself.

Her aunt remarked how her niece was changed, and noting her unusual excitability, she wondered if Madge was going to be ill. In answer to her inquiries, her niece always laughingly informed her she had never felt better in her life, and so Miss Knox once more subdued her habitual state of calm content.

The last sitting is over. And Eric Hamilton and Madge Lester are discussing the finished portrait. Madge, wearing the gorgeous gown in which she has been posing, stands by the open fireplace, with one foot resting gracefully upon the fender. The artist's eye travels from the picture to the living woman by his side, and, as he gazes in, as only a true artist can, the beauty of the living, mobile face, he feels his art is but a cold, crude thing after all, and with a quick breath of disappointment, he turns away and walks to the window.

With a woman's intuition she understands his action, and following him quickly, she places her hand upon his arm, and with eyes bright with excitement and joy, as she realizes the success he has achieved, she exclaims, in disappointed sentences:

"It is perfect, your fortune is made. Every woman who sees it will beg you to paint her portrait. And now you can—" she had almost said "marry Beatrice," when with a shudder, she remembered her compact with her friend, and so rather lamely concluded, "I know I am right. You will be the greatest portrait painter in America."

Madge had by no means overrated his work. It was beautiful beyond description. Catching some of his admirer's enthusiasm, Eric strode over to the picture, and, as he again looked at it, his heart gave a great bound, for he realized that Madge was right. He has indeed painted a masterpiece. She watched him almost breathlessly, and, as she saw the look which overpowered his face, she exclaimed:

"Ah! You, too, are how perfect it is!" He turned quickly towards her, and in a voice which thrilled her with a wild joy, he said quietly:

"Yes, it is beautiful. It is the best work I have ever done in my life, or ever shall do, though I work for all eternity. I have painted the woman I love."

She drew nearer but stood with hands clasped together, her face strangely pale, after her former excitement, her eyes fixed on his, waiting for him to tell her of his love. Loving him, as she now knows she does, with all the strength of her strong nature—and knowing she must accept his love—pass it on to another woman, God help her! Eric he continued:

The man continued, his voice sinking almost to a whisper, as he leaned towards her, and took her willing hand in his.

"Madge, dear, I think you are right. That dear portrait of my love will bring me fame, so that I shall not be obliged to make my living in any other way. I should, I know, have waited until that fame came, but my darling, I am only a man, and your praise made me forget all but that I love you—I love you. . . alone knows how much."

She is in his arms. His lips have found hers, and forgetting all but that she loves, and is beloved, she is contented that only for a few short minutes, for suddenly, like a crash of thunder on a summer day, the memory of her terrible compact rushes to her mind, and with an effort of self-control she disengages herself from her lover's arms, and says, gently:

"Eric, we are forgetting my aunt. Let us walk her, and show her your picture, and tell her our news." "One more kiss, sweetheart. Just one more," he begs, and then, still holding each other's hands, they turn to walk to where Miss Knox is sleeping in her chair.

As they are crossing the room a woman comes towards them from the curtained doorway, and with a cry, in which love and terror are strangely mixed, Madge recognizes Beatrice Vane. The two women, who have loved each other since they were children, stand and gaze one at the other, both white to the lips, and neither says one word.

Realizing that there is something amiss, Eric turns towards Madge, and as he does so, Beatrice for the first time looks into his face.

With a suppressed scream she catches the surprised man by the arm and half drags him to the window.

"Who are you?" she asks breathlessly. "You have my voice, you have his figure, but you are not he. Madge, tell me! Who is this man, who calls himself Eric Hamilton?"

Madge stands intently watching her excited friend, utterly bewildered, but with a feeling of exultation growing in her heart. She motions to her lover to speak, and looking pitifully at Beatrice, Eric says gently:

"May I ask if you are Miss Vane?" "The girl nods an eager 'Yes,' still watching his face with a carefully intent gaze, and he continues:

"I think you have mistaken me for my cousin, who bears the same name, and who is exactly my own age, and who is also an artist." Here he stops, nervously, and Beatrice says brusquely:



reason is broken, with a bitter cry she turns towards Madge, and as the piteous tears at length burst from those tortured eyes she sinks into a chair and moans and sobs. "Yes, Madge, he loved me—and I doubted him!" For some time she continues to heap reproaches on herself for having so misjudged her dear lover, and Madge listens, thankful for any change from that wretched, awful silence.

When Beatrice at length ceases to upbraid herself, Madge, anxious to keep her friend's mind occupied, questions her as to how she came to enter the room when she did.

With a start, Beatrice sits upright, and says huskily: "Ah! I had forgotten. I came, Madge, because your last letter told me you had learned to love this man, who I thought was my Eric—and I wanted to judge for myself if he, too, loved you. So I chose the time you told me you always had your sitting, and, telling the servant I would announce myself, I hid in the curtains by the door—and I listened. O, my God! what I have suffered this day! How did I interrupt me? Let me tell you all. It does not seem to talk. You both stood in the shadow, so I could not distinguish your faces, but his voice was my Eric's voice, and I never doubted but that it was he. The devil possessed me, Madge, and I prayed God to strike you dead, as you stood there, looking into his eyes, your hands in his. No pity entered into my heart for the

position I, myself, had forced you into. I only knew you had won the love I had staked more than my life to win. And—and I hated you—you, my little Madge, whom I have loved since we were babies."

"With the great tears raining each other down her flushed cheeks, Madge exclaimed:

"You didn't hate me more than I hated myself. But dear," she added, "I meant to keep my faith with you, even though I loved him so."

"Ah, yes! I felt that," Beatrice said dazedly, "and that only made me hate you the more, for it was not the man I wanted, it was his love, and I knew, as I listened, that you had had that for ever."

"But, Beatrice, you are forgetting that man is not your Eric, he is only mine. Your Eric gave his life trying to win you and your love."

A Message in Cipher.

You will deliver this packet into the hands of the Japanese ambassador, London, without a moment's unnecessary delay," said Sir Jasper Hale to Harold Malvern, an attaché to the British embassy, Paris. "You must take the train at eight, and do not err in the drive, walk, or ride to one of the outlying suburbs, and entrain there. Return with the answer as soon as you can, and be prepared to start tonight." So saying, Sir Jasper handed Malvern a small packet, which contained a letter and certain papers which Vera had marked.

By JOHN SCHOLFIELD.

Par off the sound of joyful song—" Then he stopped. With a quick flash of intuition he recognized the dotted letters. There was b-e-o-o-o-e-f-o-l all dotted. In a moment he had it. "Be careful! These were words that startled him. It was indeed a message from Vera—a message of warning—dotted words which, when deciphered, read: "You are being watched. Be on your guard against the two."

USEFUL RECIPES FOR DAINTY DISHES.

- English Pigeons—GLAZED PIGEONS.—Pluck, draw, and cleanse the birds, and blanch them. Prepare sufficient amount for the number of pigeons. With the following ingredients: Mincee, veal green onions, and mushrooms, seasoned with fine spice and well mixed with a few bread crumbs and a little milk. Stuff a few bread crumbs and a little milk. Stuff the birds with this, and wrap each in a slice of bacon and then in a sheet of paper, and roast them. Bat out and trim as many dainties of your own as you have pigeons, larding them with a few slices of fat, and put them in a sauce with a good bunch of herbs, three cloves, the trimmings of the veal, and a slice of ham, moistening it all with a little stock. When these dainties are cooked, drain well, and strain off the liquor into a clean pan, and boil it sharply till reduced to half. Now return the dainties to this, and set the pan over hot coals, so that they may sear. When all are ready remove the bacon with the veal, and dish these alternately with the veal, and pour a little essence of ham over the birds, and serve hot.