

## AN ENGAGEMENT--CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21.

and the freshness of the air outside harmonized better with his mood.

She also was out. He caught a glimpse of her white frock in the shrubbery, and overtook her with delight.

"Good morning, sweetheart," he said.

She blushed with pleasure, and surrendered her lips bashfully.

They wandered together through the orchard. Pigeons cooed and fluttered about them, and the innocence of early morning was on the scene.

"And you have been thinking of me?" she asked.

"So much! And yet I can hardly credit my good fortune."

No need to set down what they said. It was neither wiser nor wittier than the conversation of thousands of other young men and girls at the same moment. It was not until later in the day that Miss Fanshaw spoke of Bella, and questioned how he intended to act, and then she declared that he must write to her at once. She was, in fact, beginning to tell herself that she had played a shabby part, and that, whether Miss Carstairs had been deserving of him or not, she had none the less behaved meanly in tempting her cousin to jilt her. It was not as if Arnold had been false of his own accord, she felt; she had deliberately set herself to win him away from his fiancée. She had done a wicked thing!

She wanted to admit it to Arnold, but was loath to humiliate herself in his eyes; and when he demurred to sending the suggested letter, and proposed to see and speak to Bella instead, she did not press the point. Before he broke the engagement off he must—he should—hear the truth. If he liked to break it off then, he could, and she would be the happiest girl in the world; but she was not sanguine that her confession would be crowned by such a result, and, in the meantime, she had a respite. Men despised mean women.

Hopetoun, who was not a coward, intended calling upon the Carstairs on the morrow, when Bella, who was now on a visit to her relations at Morecombe, would be back in town. She had, therefore, several hours before she was required to abase herself before him, and, until the time arrived, she abandoned herself to the charm of their new relationship as completely as possible.

Nevertheless, her doubt obtruded itself constantly, and lastly a new terror came. Had she the right to let Arnold jilt the girl, even if he were willing to do so after he had heard what she had to say?

She could not determine. The matter was one capable of being regarded from many points of view, and she was alternately an advocate against herself and on her own side.

As a result, she resolved to leave the decision to the man. She would extenuate nothing, and set naught down in malice. If he could say: "I love you; I don't care what you have done—you are the only woman I can be happy with!" she would be his wife; if he reproached her, and said: "It was unwomanly, petty—it was not worthy of you, Kate," nothing should ever induce her to marry him; for, although he forgave, their matrimonial basis would be a bad one, and so surely as they tied he would reflect that she had robbed Bella Carstairs of his love, and regret his defection.

As the day wore on, gaiety became more difficult to them both. Miss Fanshaw was oppressed by the approach of her ordeal, and Hopetoun commenced to think ruefully of his mauvais quart-d'heure which lay before him on the morrow. An engagement of long standing is not the easiest of mistakes to cancel. Bella would certainly cry, and declare that he had treated her shamefully. And she would be right, unfortunately—he could not deny it! Not only had he given his affections elsewhere, but he had given them to the very girl whom Bella was viewing as a friend—her to whom she was looking to accelerate the marriage which it had become his distressing duty to say could never take place now. He shuddered. He had his share of moral courage, as has been said; but the most valiant of social heroes, which he was not, might have been excused for anticipating such a task as this with misgivings. The pauses in the conversation of the cousins became painfully frequent and woefully prolonged. The girl was asking herself, "Will he despise me?" The man was questioning, "Am I despicable?" It was a relief to them both when Drillingham broke in upon their tete-a-tete, and then a semblance of cheerfulness returned until dinner-time, when Kate said to Arnold, "Afterwards, I want to speak to you—come into the drawing-room as soon as you can!" Her face was very pale as she whispered the words. He wondered if anything was amiss.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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