

A PRECIOUS INHERITANCE.

CHAPTER XVI.

Perplexity.

"I supposed you came to be with your aunt, who, I am told, has been to you a second mother," answered Mr. Carrollton, and Anna replied: "You are right. She could not be easy until she got me here, where I know I am not wanted; at least one would be glad to have me leave."

Mr. Carrollton looked inquiringly at her, and Anna continued: "I fully supposed I was to be a companion for Margaret; but instead of that she treats me with the utmost coolness, making me feel keenly my position as a dependent."

"That does not seem at all like Maggie," said Mr. Carrollton, and with a meaning smile far more expressive than words, Anna answered: "She may not always be alike, but hush! don't I hear bells?" and she ran to the window, saying as she resumed her seat: "I thought they had come, but I was mistaken, I dare say Maggie has coaxed her grandmother to drive by the post-office, thinking there might be a letter from Henry Warner."

Her manner affected Mr. Carrollton perceptibly, but he made no reply, and Anna asked if he knew Mr. Warner?

"I saw him in Worcester, I believe," he said, and Anna continued: "Do you think him a suitable husband for a girl like Maggie?"

There was a deep flush on Arthur Carrollton's cheek, and his lips were whiter than their wont as he answered: "I know nothing of him, neither did I suppose Miss Miller ever thought of him for a husband."

"I know she did at one time," said his tormentor, turning the leaves of her book, with well-feigned indifference. "It was not any secret, or I should not speak of it; of course, Madam Conway was greatly opposed to it, too, and forbade her writing to him; but how the matter is now I do not positively know, though I am quite sure they are engaged."

"Isn't it very close here? Will you please to open the hall door?" said Mr. Carrollton, suddenly panting for breath; and, satisfied with her work, Anna did as desired and then left him alone.

"Maggie engaged!" he exclaimed, "engaged, when I was hoping to win her for myself!" and a sharp pang shot through his heart as he thought of giving to another the beautiful girl who had grown so into his love. "But I am glad I learned it in time," he continued, hurriedly walking the floor, "knew it ere I had done Henry Warner a wrong by telling her of my love, and asking her to go with me to my English home, which this why she repulsed me in the woods. She knew I ought not to speak of love to her. Why didn't I see it before, or why has not Madam Conway told me the truth? She at least has deceived me, and with a feeling of keen disappointment he continued to pace the floor, one moment resolving to leave Hillsdale at once, and again thinking how impossible it was to tear himself away.

Arthur Carrollton was a perfectly honourable man, and once assured of Maggie's engagement, he would neither by word or deed do aught to which she would object.

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ALL DRUGGISTS

the most fastidious lover could object, and Henry Warner's rights were as safe with him as with the truest of friends. But was Maggie really engaged? Might there not be some mistake? He hoped so at least, and alternating between hope and fear, he waited impatiently for the return of Maggie, who, with each thought of losing her, seemed tenfold dearer to him than she had ever been before; and when at last she came bounding in, he could scarcely refrain from folding her in his arms, and asking her to think again ere she gave another than herself the right of calling her his bride.

But she is not mine, he thought, and so he merely took her cold hands within his own, rubbing them until they were warm. Then seating himself by her side upon the sofa, he spoke of her ride, asking casually if she called at the post-office.

"No, we did not drive that way," she answered, readily, adding that the post-office had few attractions for her now, as no one wrote to her save Theo.

She evidently spoke the truth, and with a feeling of relief Mr. Carrollton thought that possibly Miss Jeffrey might have been mistaken; but he would know at all hazards, even though he ran the risk of being treated extremely rude. Accordingly, that evening, after Mrs. Jeffrey and Anna had retired to their room, and while Madam Conway was giving some household directions in the kitchen, he asked her to come and sit by him as he lay upon the sofa, himself placing her chair where the lamp-light would fall fully upon her face and reveal its every expression.

Closing the piano, she complied with his request, and then awaited in silence for what he was to say.

"Maggie," he began, "you may think me bold, but there is something I very much wish to know, and which you if you choose, can tell me. From what I have heard, I am led to think you are engaged. Will you tell me if this is true?"

The bright color faded out from Maggie's cheek, while her eyes grew darker than before, and still she did not speak. Not that she was angry with him for asking her that question; but because the answer, which if made at all, must be yes, was hard to utter. Ah! yet why should she hesitate to tell him the truth at once?

"Alas, for thee, Maggie Miller! The fancied love you feel for Henry Warner is fading fast away. Arthur Carrollton is a dangerous rival, and even now you cannot meet the glance of his expressive eyes without a blush! Your better judgment acknowledged his superiority to Henry long ago, and now in your heart there is room for none save him."

"Maggie," he said, again stretching out his hand to take the unresisting one which lay upon her lap, "you need not make me another answer save that so plainly written on your face. You are engaged, and may Heaven's blessing attend both you and yours."

At this moment Madam Conway appeared, and, fearing her inability to control her feelings longer, Maggie precipitately left the room. Going to her chamber, she burst into a passionate fit of weeping, one moment blaming Mr. Carrollton for having learned her secret, and the next chiding herself for wishing to withhold from him a knowledge of her engagement.

"It is not that I love Henry less, I am sure," she thought, and laying her head upon her pillow, she recalled everything which had passed between herself and her affianced husband, trying to bring back the old happiness with which she had listened to his words of love. But it would not come; there was a barrier in the way. Arthur Carrollton as he looked when he said so sadly: "You need not tell me, Maggie."

"Oh, I wish he had not asked me that question," she sighed. "It has put such dreadful thoughts into my head. And yet I love Henry as well as ever: I know I do, I am sure of it, or, if I do not, I will," and repeating to herself again and again the words, "I will, I will," she fell asleep.

Will, however, is not always subservient to one's wishes, and during the first few days succeeding the incident of that night Maggie often found herself wishing that Arthur Carrollton had never come to Hillsdale, he made her so wretched, so unhappy.

Inensibly, too, she became a very little unamiable, speaking pettishly to her grandmother, disrespectfully to Mrs. Jeffrey, haughtily to Anna, and rarely to Mr. Carrollton, who after the lapse of two or three weeks, began to talk of returning home in the same vessel with Anna Jeffrey, at which time his health would be fully restored. Then, indeed, did Maggie awake to the reality that while her hand was pledged to one, she loved another—not as in days gone by she had loved Henry Warner, but with a deeper, more absorbing love. With this knowledge, too, there came the thought that Arthur Carrollton had once loved her, and but for the engagement now so much regretted, he would ere this have told her so. But it was too late! too late! He would never feel toward her again as he once had felt, and bitter tears shed as she contemplated the fast coming future, when Arthur Carrollton would be gone, or, shuddering, thought of the time when Henry Warner would return to claim her promise.

"I cannot, cannot marry him," she cried, "until I've torn that other image from my heart," and then for many days she strove to recall the olden love in vain; for, planted on the sandy soil of childhood, as it were, it had been outgrown, and would never again spring into life. "I will write to him exactly how it is," she said at last: "will tell him that the affection I felt for him could not feel for her husband. I was young, had seen nothing of the world, knew nothing of gentlemen's society, and when he came, with his handsome face and winning ways, my interest was awakened. Sympathy, too, for his misfortune increased that interest, which grandma's opposition tended in no wise to diminish. But it has died out that fancied love, and I cannot bring it back. Still, if he insists, I will keep my word, and when he comes next autumn I will not tell him No."

Maggie was very calm when this declaration was reached, and opening her writing-desk she wrote just as she said she would, begging of him to forgive her if she had done him wrong, and beseeching Rose to comfort him as only a sister like her could do. "And remember," she wrote at the close, "remember the sooner than see you very unhappy. I will marry you, will try to be a faithful wife; though Henry, I would rather not—oh, so much rather not."

The letter was finished, and the Maggie took it to her grandmother who read it eagerly, for in it she saw a fulfillment of her wishes. Very closely had she watched both Mr. Carrollton and Maggie, readily divining the truth, and she was glad to see between them. But from past experience she deemed it wiser not to interfere directly. Mr. Carrollton's avowed intention of returning to England however, startled her, and she was revolving some method of procedure when Margaret brought her the letter.

"I am happier than I can well express," she said, when she had finished reading it. "Of course you may have permission to send it. But what has changed you, Maggie? Has another taken the place of Henry Warner?"

"Don't ask me, grandma," cried Maggie, covering her face with her hands, "don't ask me, for indeed I can only tell you that I am very unhappy."

A little skillful questioning on Madam Conway's part sufficed to explain the whole—how constant association with Arthur Carrollton had won for him a place in Maggie's heart, which Henry Warner had never filled; how the knowledge that she loved him as she could love no other one had faintly revealed itself to her on the night when he asked her if she were engaged, and had burst upon her with overwhelming power when she heard that he was going home.

"He will never think of me again till he falls," she said; "but, with my present feelings, I cannot marry Henry unless he insists upon it."

"A man seldom wishes to marry a woman who says she does not love him," said Mr. Carrollton, who had been standing by her side, and who now spoke as if he were speaking to himself.

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him, and Henry Warner will not prove an exception," answered Madam Conway, and, comforted with this assurance, Mag folded up her letter, which was soon on its way to Cuba.

The next evening, as Madam Conway sat alone with Mr. Carrollton, she spoke of his return to England, expressing her sorrow, and asking why he did not remain with them longer.

"I will deal frankly with you, Madam," said he, "and say that if I followed my own inclination I should stay, for Hillsdale holds for me an attraction which no other spot possesses. I refer to your granddaughter, who, in the little time I have known her, has grown very dear to me; so dear that I dare not stay longer where she is, lest I should love her too well, and rebel against yielding her to another."

For a moment Madam Conway hesitated; but thinking the case demanded her speaking, she said: "Possibly, Mr. Carrollton, I can make an explanation which will show some points in a different light from that in which you now see them. Margaret is engaged to Henry Warner. I will admit; but the engagement has become likelihood only yesterday when she wrote, asking a release, which he will grant of course."

Instantly the expression of Mr. Carrollton's face was changed, and very intently he listened, while Madam Conway frankly told him the story of Margaret's engagement up to the present time, withholding from him nothing, not even Mag's confession of the interest she felt in him, an interest which had weakened her girlish attachments for Henry Warner.

"You have made me very happy," Mr. Carrollton said to Madam Conway, as, at a late hour, he bade her good-night, "happier than I can well express; for, without Margaret, life to me would be dreary indeed."

The next morning, at the breakfast table, Anna Jeffrey, who was in high spirits with the prospect of having Mr. Carrollton for a fellow-traveler, spoke of their intended voyage, saying she could hardly wait for the time to come, and asking if he were not really impatient to leave so horrid a country as America.

(To be continued.)

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Mrs. So-and-so is terribly patient with her husband," we hear, the other day he was minutes late to dinner and she

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The cutaway jacket is one of the features of the spring styles. In models it is shown with a red edge bound in braid.

Quant little bonnets of straw, fa