

## CHAPTER III.

For several days the girl puzzled her brain over this problem.

"I wish Alexander had not been so silly," she sighed for the hundredth time. "It was positively criminal of him to choose me when he might just as easily have fallen in love with Dorry and saved all this trouble. But men never seem to see things properly."

While she was still vainly endeavoring to find out a way out of the difficulty the receipt of a telegram brought matters to a crisis.

It was short and concise. "Arrived yesterday. Will be with you this afternoon. —Alexander."

"The wretch! He might at least have waited till he was asked," she exclaimed, pettishly, forgetful of the fact that a man returning from abroad might not naturally consider himself justified in visiting the girl to whom he was engaged without waiting a formal invitation. "I suppose he will come and blurt the story of our engagement all over the place! I wonder what he will say when he comes? Perhaps he will want to kiss me! Horrors! If Dick gets to hear of it there will be a dreadful row! I won't face him! I'll run away first!"

She consulted a time-table. It was three o'clock. In all probability he would arrive by a train due about 3.30. In less than an hour he would be in the house.

What should she do? To run away would be foolish; it would simply mean a postponement of the fateful meeting.

The proximity of the crisis quickened her brain! Swiftly she reviewed the situation. Her mother was out; there was no one in the house but her cousin and the servant.

Hastily donning her hat and jacket she went down to the drawing room where her cousin was sitting reading.

"I am sorry to deprive you of my company, Dorry; but I am going out for a little," she exclaimed, as she entered "you won't weary, will you? I shan't be long."

"Don't apologise. I'm quite comfortable, and very much better employed than listening to your senseless chatter," returned the cousin without looking up.

"Thank you. You are complimentary. Ta ta."

Her next visit was to the kitchen.

"I say, Bridget," she said, "I'm going out, if a gentleman—or any one, you understand—should call and ask for me don't mention that I am out. Just show him into the drawing-room, will you?"

"Very well, Miss; I'll remember."

"All right, Bridget. I'll be back shortly."

Reaching the street she strode briskly along until she was out of sight of the windows. After loitering a moment she quickly retraced her steps, and entering by a little side gate stole softly towards the conservatory, which was built against the side of the house, and noiselessly entered.

An inside door of the conservatory opened to the drawing-room. Peering between the curtains the girl could see her cousin sitting by the fire deeply engrossed in her book. Satisfied that her return had not been noticed she noiselessly sank into a lounge chair.

Half an hour passed—one hour. The girl began to think her plotting had been in vain when the sudden jingle of the door bell brought her with a rush to the peep-hole in the curtain.

A few moments later Bridget ushered a tall bearded gentleman into the room. For a moment he gazed rapturously at the occupant, who had risen to her feet on his entrance, then with a cry of "Dora, my darling!" he rushed forward, and ere the girl could utter one word of protest covered her face with kisses.

With an exclamation of indignation she extricated herself from his embrace.

"Why, darling, what is the matter?" he exclaimed apprehensively. "Are you not glad to see me?"

"I am very pleased to see you back again; but I am not accustomed to express my pleasure at seeing gentleman friends in—er—such a demonstrative fashion."

"But, Dora, am I not entitled to special privileges? Surely, surely your sentiments have not changed? If you could only realise how I have longed all these years for one glimpse of your sweet face you would understand and pardon my seeming boldness."

The girl glanced at him shyly.

"I scarcely comprehend you," she said. "Do you really mean that you have—have cared for me so much all these years?"

"Cared for you! Dora, you must know how deeply I have loved you. And I want you to come out with me as my wife. You'll come, won't you, darling?"

"If—if you really want me, I'll—"

"Want you! Of course I want you! Why, it was to plead with you that I came home. Perhaps I have been too sudden, but time is so short. In two months, perhaps less, I must return. Don't say I must go back alone."

"Two months! It's not a very long time to get ready, but—but I'll try."

"My darling! You have made me happier than I can tell"—and he kissed her again without raising a word of protest.

For half an hour the two lovers, all unconscious of the maze of mistaken identity into which they had wandered, and equally unconscious of the fact that the real Dora was surveying the scene with undisguised satisfaction, sat discussing the future in low tones.

As the minutes passed Dora began to get impatient. As she afterwards plaintively remarked, "Lovemaking is nice enough when it's oneself, but it's awfully sickening to watch other people after the first five minutes or so." Consequently it was with feelings of relief she heard Bridget knock at the door and call her cousin out of the room.

This was the opportunity she was waiting for. No sooner had the door closed behind her cousin than, with a fine assumption of injured dignity, she turned, the handle and stalked into the drawing-room.

"Mr. Fraser, I believe?" she remarked frigidly.

The gentleman who had been standing with his back to her, started violently at the sound of her voice and wheeled quickly round.

For a moment he stood gazing at her in incredulous wonder, and his face assumed an ashy pallor.

"Dora! As I live! Where in all the world did you come from?"

"Miss Stansfield, if you please, she retorted icily. "If you desire to know where I come from, I may tell you I have just come from witnessing a scene which even you must admit precludes me from allowing you to address me in that familiar manner again."

"Good heavens! Am I dreaming! This is not real! It must be a horrible fantasy of the brain! My goodness, if you are Dora, who was the young lady that I—who was here just now? There is some horrible mistake somewhere!"

"It seems to me the chief mistake was on my part in believing your protestations of affection. Thank goodness, my eyes have been opened in time! Mr. Fraser, what does the world think of a man who protests love for a girl and yet—well, you know what I witnessed a few moments ago."

"But I tell you it is all a mistake—a huge mistake! I thought all the time it was you!"

"Really, Mr. Fraser, you cannot believe that I am simple enough to accept such a feeble explanation."

"This is dreadful! Who was the young lady? I will go to her and explain everything."

As he spoke he moved towards the door, but Dora quickly stepped in front of him.

"Mr. Fraser," she said sternly, "you will do nothing of the kind. You know

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very well who you were speaking to—my cousin Dora. Poor Dorry, though you have treated me so cruelly and deceitfully, I shall not permit you to act towards her in the same manner. I have known for long that she cared for you, and I shall not allow you to break her heart also. Distinctly I heard you promise to marry her. If you are a gentleman, you will keep your promise. If you refuse, I shall take steps to make your infamy known to the world."

The young man drew out his handkerchief and mopped the perspiration from his forehead.

"It's the most extraordinary thing I ever heard tell of," he exclaimed. "I cannot understand it! I don't know what to do."

"It seems to me your course of action is perfectly clear. You have asked my cousin Dora to be your wife and gained her consent. You must marry her! There is no alternative!"

"Do—do you think she really cares for me?"

"I am sure of it; otherwise I would not let you off so easily. Are you willing to fulfill the promise you made her?"

"I—I suppose so. As you say, there seems to be no alternative."

"In that case I shall say nothing more of your duplicity, and for your own sake I would advise you to remain equally silent. Dora, poor girl, has not the slightest suspicion there was ever anything between us, but mere friendship, and if by word or look you seek to deceive her I shall consider it my duty to take steps which we might both regret. I am going to congratulate her on her engagement. Remember!"—and with a sweeping courtesy she marched out of the room.

Reaching the hall her dignity quickly left her. With a stifled giggle she flew up the stairs two at a time.

"Oh, my goodness!" she exclaimed, as she reached the sanctuary of her own room. "I never saw such a comedy in all my life! Alexander's face was worth giving pounds to see! I never thought I would have got out of the difficulty so easily! Dick has always been pestering me to name the day, but of course I couldn't with this sword of Damocles hanging over my head! Now, thank goodness, that is past and done with, and I can tell him to make it the day after Alexander and his bride sail for the South Seas!"—Glasgow Herald.

Rev. Alexander Dowie, the modern "Elijah," is reported to be lying near death at Zion City, Chicago, though his attendants have tried to conceal his true condition. It is said that he can only live a very short time. Last week Dowie asked that his wife and son be sent for, and to those nearest to him made full confession of the wrongs he has done to those with whom he has had dealings.

Mrs. Isabella Beecher Hooker, the last of the children of the Rev. Lyman Beecher, sister of Henry Ward Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, died at her home at Hartford, Conn., on the 25th ult.