

# Grand Alliance; Love That Knew No Bounds.

CHAPTER XXX.

"Oh, why not?" she returned, her brightness all evaporating. But to this Mr. Hurst only made indistinct response as to "trespassing too much," and walked away, leaving Sydney to begin her assorting down-cast and sad.

Mr. Babbington dined with them the next day. Before the meal he talked some while aside with his hostess, and presently at the table asked Mr. Hurst if he were intending to go to the Jarvis's on Friday, these being people who for a couple of summer months rusticated and fished at Perristone, a little higher up the river. Slight acquaintance, begun the previous year with Mr. Hurst, was followed up this season by an invitation to dinner.

"For you only, Gilbert," Miss Hurst had commented on the note, arrived that morning. "Mrs. Jervis is down, I understand, but they have not included me. Oh dear, no! Perhaps they have never noticed me. Or if they do know there is such a person, why, I'm only your elder sister. I have no position to make any one take account of me. Don't be offended at it Gilbert. I'm not. I'm above being offended, though I can't help feeling it. You'll go?" But Mr. Hurst had told her gently to decline. He cared nothing whatever about it, and Miss Jean seemed gratified. Now she appeared to have altered. Answering for her brother—"Oh, he must certainly accept," she said; "to oblige me, Gilbert," she really, really must. Etiquette is nothing at all to me, so long as you get a pleasant evening."

"So I will call round and walk up with you," offered Mr. Babbington; but Mr. Hurst replying, "It brings you out of your road. I would rather make my way there alone." Then I will return with you, at any rate," persisted the clergyman, with a meaningful glance at Miss Jean: "Your sister will feel easier if you agree to that, I know." And Mr. Hurst acquiesced rather than combat such a trifle.

At seven o'clock on the day of this dining at Perristone, Sydney wandered from garden to drawing-room, intending to write there part at least, of her letter to Jacob Cheene. Miss Hurst was cutting out jackets for the small Babbingtons in the study. Mr. Hurst she imagined gone. But there she was mistaken. Not due for an-



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other half hour at his entertainers', he was standing on the hearth-rug, waiting, before he started, for the farewell inspection his sister had required, and Sydney halted on the window-step, letting her gaze, first of surprise, then of something more rest on that tall, well-built figure in Englishman's evening uniform. Another June evening, another man so dressed, she remembered vividly, and hung her head, as if for that wretched bubble of misdirected fancy she owed apology to the presence before her. He could not see that mantling shame nor divine that secret self-reproach; but a keen sense of both bade her draw back, away from him. An instant and she would have been gone, but just too soon Miss Jean came hurrying in, one hand bandaged with a handkerchief.

"So you are ready, Gilbert? or think you are. But, Miss Grey, would you very kindly give me the brush off the hall-stand? Thank you. Stretch your arm out, Gilbert. I hate a speck of dust on broadcloth, and, of course, you can't tell if its there. Do you remember how I used to brush you in your school-days when you never would stand still? Dear, dear, to think I have to do it now, and you— and everything—so different. But I never have repined. I don't mean to, even if—oh, Gilbert—breaking off to turn aside and wipe her eyes.

"Your poor old sister does like to see you as you are looking now. She is always ready to be proud of you! But come, you are not finished off yet. Mrs. Jervis is a bride, they tell me. You must go properly adorned. Where is a flower for your button-hole?"

"I want none, Jean. Let me be off now, I shall be late."

"Not till you have a flower. Miss Grey, are those wild rosebuds you are wearing? They are lovely, anyhow. May we rob you of them?"

"No, Jean, No!"

"They are your own," said Sydney, unfastening them from her dress. "Davis had clipped them from the orchard hedge. I brought them in so that they should not die entirely neglected," and she held the delicate cluster out.

Miss Hurst sighed at her own disabled fingers.

in the wight, Miss Hurst returned nervous, tremulous, delightedly important.

"I have been too long, but I could not tear myself away from little Horace. He was crying for his father. Nothing would comfort him but my stopping till he fell asleep. Ah, it makes a woman very happy, Miss Grey, to have children fond of her; even—other people's!"

Then Miss Jean fitted away, smiling as she recalled the child's little warm hold upon her wrist. Presently back she came, suggesting, "Don't let me keep you up longer than you like, Miss Grey. I want to talk to you very much, but I think it must be to-morrow. Of course I shall sit up for my brother; but you had best not wait."

"Are you sure the time will not seem long if you are alone?" Sydney asked, nothing loath, though, to escape a tete-a-tete.

"Oh, not the least. I would rather you went. Which sounds rude, but it only means I am not good company to-night. For—oh, Miss Grey, I must tell you this much—Mr. Babbington wants me to forget all these past years; to marry him now! He told me so three weeks ago. I have been distracted as to what was my duty. I told him yesterday I dare not answer for myself. Gilbert must decide. And he is going to talk to Gilbert as they come home from Perristone. It does agitate me so. You won't mind my saying good-night. I can—oh, dear—I can tell you more to-morrow!" How much more, and what would it be?

Sydney shook loose her heavy braids, wrapped her dark dressing-gown about her, and gathered herself up on the deep window-ledge in her bed-room, to ponder over that. Sore-hearted, jealous, resentful—not for herself—smarting irrationally for some one else and what the coming hour was bringing him. Mutely she kept vexed vigil, while the outer world, that had sunk into shadow with the falling eve, rewoke to clear untinted shape beneath a full June moon. From beyond the far, dim hills: touching the west woods' crests, down the still, billow-like masses of full foliage; to wreaths of mist about the meadows, the silver light had stolen before; through the perfect quiet, voices sounded nearing Wynstone. By the gate some minutes' monologue ensued. Then an interchange of good-nights, and Mr. Hurst re-entered the house to meet Miss Jean.

Well Sydney knew if arbitration were left to him what the issue of that conference would be. Acutely, as inarticulate sounds rose from the lower room to her open casement, imagination kept pace with the painful steps Gilbert Hurst must now be treading of self-renunciation to what-over point his sister's happiness demanded. For him, for his future, there was no one to plead; no one by to care! And she, an Alwyn, who ought most of any in the world to have helped him now, could do it less than the veriest stranger in the world. With a bitter flood of tears she buried her face in her hands, and feverishly struggled long to quell the useless torrent. When, throbbing and aching, she raised her head at last, the voices underneath had ceased. A foot-fall, Miss Jean's, traversed the lobby to the opposite room, and the hush of near midnight settled on the house.

But sleep seemed as far from Sydney's eyes as if the dawn of another day were nigh; as indeed, in some sort, it was.

Miss Jean's palpitations had long subsided into slumber, and still Sydney stood at the window, tormented

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by yearnings, passionate as futile, to furnish Gilbert Hurst, master, instructor to her as he had been, second thus only to Mr. Vaughan, clever as she was, noble and worthy, to furnish him now with some haven from this last storm of homelessness that threatened him.

So earnestly she was thinking, looking starward, that a movement below was unheeded. A figure from the house crossed the lawn, passed over the sloping meadow to the curve of the stream beside two drooping willows, then stood, a bare six inches from the eddying pool. Then her eyes suddenly rested on it—took in the spot, the form. Something more subtle than instinct showed her the peril of that conjunction, and in that moment's awful fear she knew the truth. Gilbert Hurst's life was dearer to her than her own! Swift as thought, with soundless, slippered feet she was down the stairs, out from the open window, over the grass, near, near, nearer to him; and not a whit too soon!

Forgive him all who can. Bethink you, any who would condemn, how horribly close to mortal sin most men some time or other of their pilgrimage have been. How the strongest heart has had its hour of sickening weakness. How the lives of well-nigh all mortals know some era when sense and even faith are overridden by agony that seems incurable. Such slow-gathering through months, culminated to-night in the hour when any world promised Gilbert Hurst more rest than this. In the white full light he stood, every pain-racked feature plain, one hand pressed hard upon his mouth. For one beat of the pulse he swayed; another—

"Wait patiently for Him; and—He shall give thee thy heart's desire."  
(To be Continued.)

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