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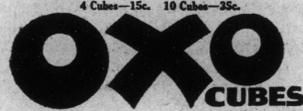


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Cup

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Love a Conqueror —OR— WEDDED AT LAST.

CHAPTER LII

"Is not the picture pleasant in your eyes, Guy?" asked the dying man, conquering his difficulty of

breathing and of utterance in his desire to continue. "Or are your eyes so dim with watching in this little room that they cannot see it? Let me go on, Guy; and do not grieve so bitterly. Can't you guess the pleasure these dreams have given me? I see too, in that happy home, a pale young mother lying with a child in her arms who is your son, Guy," he resumed after a moment's pause. "I see the stately old house bright with restless little children, whose swift feet scamper down the galleries, and whose sweet gay voices echo through the old rooms, filling them with mirth and laughter. Guy, sometimes in the old days, before this heavy trouble came upon us, I used to think that if Heaven had given us a little child things might have been different; but oh, how thankful I am now that—"

His voice failed him, and he sank back upon the pillows. There was a long silence, broken only by his struggling breathing, before he spoke again. "Will my dreams be realized, Guy?" he said wistfully. "Hugh, dear fellow!" was all Guy could say, as he lifted his head for a moment and looked at him. "You love her still, old friend?" "As I have always loved her."

"That is well. And she loves you; you will be very happy." "I will do my best," Guy said tremulously; and a faint glad smile parted the thin lips. "There was something inexpressibly pathetic and touching in the thought of the dying man thus planning a life of happiness for those whom he had so cruelly wronged. Strong man as he was, Guy Stuart had some difficulty in restraining his tears. "Is it almost time now?" murmured Sir Hugh restlessly, after a few moments. "She is not late Guy?" "No—oh, no! She is never late Hugh."

"Never late!" he repeated softly. "No, Heaven bless her!" Almost as the words left his lips the door opened softly and Shirley entered. She was very pale, pale even than her wont, for Mr. Litton had told her how near the end was; but there was a steady brightness in the eyes which went so earnestly to the pale face on the pillows, and

which saw the sudden wonderful brightness which came over it as Sir Hugh's dying gaze dwelt upon her. "Dear Hugh"—there was an infinite tenderness in the sweet voice as she bent over him—"how is it with you?" "It is well, my darling," he answered softly, weakly lifting her hand to his lips in his usual caress of tender greeting, while his wife touched his brow with her lips, and felt, with a quick pang, how icy cold it was already.

"See what I have brought you!" she said cheerfully. "Are not these lovely, Hugh?" They were some fragrant hot-house flowers, and they seemed to Hugh Glynn to bring in some of the freshness and beauty of the earth which he would never see again. His eyes rested on them with a great sadness and an intense longing. "They are lovely," he said, "and so sweet!"

She held them up to him, and he inhaled their fragrance and touched them with his languid fingers tenderly, almost as if they had been living and could feel his touch. Shirley watched him with quivering lips. "Madgie sent them, Hugh, with her love," she said.

"Did she? That was good of her, the pretty child! She is like a flower herself, a bonny English rose. The time has seemed long, Shirley," he went on wistfully, looking at her. "You have been waiting, Hugh?" she said sorrowfully. "I am always waiting for you, Shirley."

She bent over him tenderly, putting back with gentle hands his hair from his damp brow. "I will not leave you again, Hugh," she whispered; and a wonderful brightness came over his face. "Is it indeed so?" he said eagerly. "You may stay with me?"

"Yes; they have given me leave." "Ah! There was a slight pause; then he added softly, "I understand."

She smoothed his pillows, making him easier in his rest, and, having given him something to moisten his parched lips, she sat down by him where his eyes could rest upon her. "Do not go, Guy," he whispered presently, when Major Stuart made a movement to depart. "Stay with us—we need you!"

And Guy stayed. The minutes went by and grew in hours in the little white-washed room, where it grew dark so early, and the dying eyes rarely left Shirley's face, except to rest for a moment upon the flowers. "I am glad I saw her once," he said struggling against his increasing weakness. "She will make Jack happy." "Yes, dear Hugh."

"I am glad I had an opportunity of thanking her for her goodness to you, Shirley," he murmured. Heaven bless her for it—Jack's pretty little sweetheart!"

After that there was a long silence, during which Hugh lay back upon closed eyes, the ashy-gray pallor deepening, and the shadows darkening round his lips.

"You are not suffering, Hugh?" Shirley whispered once.

"No, darling," he answered, opening

his eyes and letting them rest upon her now with ineffable love. "I am past all suffering now." "And—and you are not afraid?" "Afraid? No, my dearest. I am so tired; and the thought of rest is so grateful to me. I feel as if I were travelling to meet a friend, Shirley, and as if I were footsore and weary after the long dreary road; but the end is no near now—the journey is almost done."

He slept for a while, and when he next spoke, the short rest seemed to have refreshed him, for his voice was a trifle stronger, and not so husky.

"There is one thing, Guy, I want to say to you," he said earnestly—so earnestly that Shirley's eyes filled. "It has been on my lips so often; but somehow things seem to drift away from me, and I forget. Guy, will you—I am leaving all my cares to you, dear fellow—will you see if there is any one belonging to that poor fellow to whom you can make any poor statement?"

"I will make every possible search, Hugh. Trust me."

"Thank you, old friend. I do not think there is anything else," he said wearily. "And nothing troubles me now," he added, in a moment, "but the remembrance of the pain I have given you, my darling."

"Do not let that trouble you, Hugh; forget it now, even as I have," she said earnestly.

"I cannot forget it, dear," he murmured, with the same weariness. "It is always present with me—present with me oftener than the look on that poor fellow's dead face which haunted me so terribly at first."

"Hugh, will you not try to think of other things now?" she whispered tremulously.

"I will think—as I have thought so often of late, my dearest—of the visions I have seen—the visions of which I have told you, and of which he will speak to you some day."

He looked at his friend for a moment with a grateful smiling regard; then he turned his face toward Shirley, and she rested her head on the pillow beside his.

The end was drawing near now. Presently the doctor came in. He stayed a few moments, and administered a restorative which lessened the difficulty of breathing; and Sir Hugh thanked him faintly for all his kindness and patience ere he went away again.

In the stone passage without he met Captain Graham coming toward him. "It is a question of minutes now," said the surgeon, in answer to the questioning look. "He has not half an hour to live."

"How does she bear it?" "Bravely. I think her face looks like the face of an angel just now."

His face touched with a deep compassion, the governor passed on, and entered the cell. Hugh glanced at him with startled eyes; he was lying now with his head supported by Shirley's arm, and his hand closed unconsciously over her fingers as Captain Graham entered.

"You will not take her away?" he said, with pale lips. "No—oh, no!" was the immediate answer.

"Thank you. You have been very good to me. Will you take my hand?" Instantly Captain Graham took the proffered hand in a friendly clasp. Sir Hugh smiled faintly, thanked him again, and then turned once more to his wife.

The governor of Adinbroke Castle had seen and would probably see many sad sights in the years he had spent or would spend within the walls of the old prison. He had seen agony and woe and defiance and terror, but he had seen no sight which had touched him so deeply as this; no scene had ever passed before his eyes so full of sad significance and pathos, and a mist came between him and the group by the bed on which the freight fell, touching Sir Hugh's face as he lay back upon the pillows and lingering on the soft folds of Shirley's velvet dress and on her bent uncovered head, while Guy knelt in the shadow, and the fragrance from the bright-hued flowers rose sweetly upon the air. Captain Graham was not an impressionable man, but to him in after years, as well as to Guy, the scent of stephanotis or a glimpse of its white, starry blossoms always brought back that scene.

Presently, when the governor had left them, the chaplain of the prison entered, a gentle, white-haired clergyman, a fitting bearer of the Master's message to the sin-sick souls among whom he labored so patiently and untriflingly. As he stood by Shirley's side he put his hand upon her head with a murmured blessing. He knew all her story, for he had been constantly with Hugh during the past three weeks, and the latter had received his ministrations with gratitude and earnest penitence. He greeted him now with a smile and a few murmured words of thanks; then his eyes came back to rest once more on Shirley's beloved face, never to leave it again.

It was an evidence of Sir Hugh's deep penitence and humiliation that all this time he had never called Shirley by the name of wife; nor had he ever kissed the sweet tender lips which had spoken only words of gentleness to him since that Christmas night. He was not worthy, he felt with bitter pain; and sometimes, when she bent over him to put her lips to his brow, he shrank from her as if the touch brought pain. But now, as his weakness increased, he moved his head feebly, so that it should rest upon her breast; and she supported him with unflinching gentleness.

"Do you suffer, Hugh?"

"No, my dearest."

(To be continued.)

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