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The Sound of Wedding Bells

—OR—
Won After Great Perseverance!

CHAPTER X.

She looks up at him again, then her eyes droop.

"Promise me that you won't cry again?"

"I—I don't know," she says; and a woeful little smile flutters over the lovely face. "It depends."

"On me?" he says. "Then you shall not. Come, Dulcie"—persuasively, as one would address a beautiful, spoiled child, whose tears are torture to witness—"trust me a little. I'll be a brother to you. Will that reassure you?"

"No," she says; and her face is scarlet while her lips quiver.

"Not!" he says, puzzled, and almost reproachful. "Is there not even to be friendship between us? Oh, Dulcie, this is hard. Believe me, I would be a faithful friend to you, come what may."

She glances up at him, at the handsome, noble face, on which sits, all too palpable, the anxious desire to please her at any cost, and her heart goes out to him.

"Come," he says, "that is a bargain; let us shake hands upon it, and then I shall feel that you are reassured, and that you have forgiven me," and he holds out his hand in what he trusts is a fair imitation of a brotherly manner; but his eyes gleam and lighten, and his breath comes fast, as she puts her slim hand into his palm.

"There," he says, with a sigh; "and now we're friends, are we not; and there shall be no more—nonsense"—with a grim, wistful little smile—between us! Are you satisfied?" with a short laugh that is full of hidden bitterness and disappointment.

She looks up at him with an effort, as if her eyes were heavy to raise.

"No—!"

"No!" he says.

She shakes her head.

"That is rather unreasonable, scarcely fair," he says, with a smile. "Since I, who craved for a loaf, am well, prepared to accept half a one, and you will not grant me that! I asked you for your love; you refused it. Will you not give me your friendship?"

"No," she says; "I—hate—friendship!"

He stares at her. Another man, less manly and honest, and humble, would understand her, but she is a mystery to him.

"Dulcie," he says, "you are a strange girl! I understand there is to be just a truce between us until I go. Very well, I accept even that. At any rate, though you refuse my friendship, you cannot prevent my loving you. There! I am sinning again. I had better go to the cottage, and tell them to fetch the pony-chaise; I shall not be out of your sight. You won't cry again?"

Then she looks up, and there is a piteous little self-abasement in the dark eyes, a piteous shame in the scarlet face.

"Yes, I shall," she says; "I shall cry the moment you have gone! I shall cry my eyes out!"

"But why?" he asks, astounded and troubled.

"Because—" she says, then she falters, though her eyes meet his bravely and desperately; she cannot let him go again, ah, no! not again.

"Because"—a sudden hope—too wild, as it seems to him—springs up within his breast, and he comes nearer to her.

"Well!" he breathes rather than says.

"Because—I love you!"

It is said at last, and with the effort her face goes pale with shame and self-scorn.

Sir Hugh stands looking down at her, his own face almost white with the sudden reaction, stands there for a moment, then goes on his knees beside her, and somehow her face is hidden upon his breast, and he pours a rain of kisses upon her head.

"No! no!" she pants, at last, breathless and trembling, putting up her hand to ward him off.

He starts.

"Dulcie! You—this is not a jest!" with sudden, fierce, almost savage, alarm; and he holds her at arm's length, his eyes scanning the downcast face.

She looks at him—there is a smile about and upon her lips and in her eyes—and shakes her head.

"A jest!" she says. "No! I—I almost wish it was! It wouldn't be so shameful."

There is something in her voice that reassures him, and he clasps her to him again.

"Shameful!" he echoes, with a low, glad laugh.

"Yes!" she murmurs. "Shameful! You had gone! and I had called you back!"

He strokes her hair, and laughs softly.

"And I was so reluctant to come!" he says. "Ah, Dulcie, why did you play with me? It was play to you, but torture—death to me! Why did you do it? Shameful! It would have

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been shameful if you had let me go knowing this! Oh, my dear!" and his voice is low and gentle as a woman's, and as anxious, "are you sure? Do you really care for me? Is it really—love? It seems so impossible—too great a thing to be true. Tell me, Dulcie, tell me in plain words, that you love me."

She looks up at him, and there is a trace of the old mockery in her eyes.

"In plain words, then," she says, and her lips quiver. "Ah, why should I say it? but I will—love you! Are you satisfied?" with delicate, tender mockery of his own question.

"Quite!" he responds, his handsome face eager and passionate. "Quite, Dulcie, a man would be hard to please who was not satisfied with you, my beautiful queen!" She looks at him with a faint smile, meditatively.

"Do you think I am beautiful?" she says, with no spark of vanity; with as much candor and frankness as if she had asked him if he thought her tall or dark.

He smiles, that smile of proud proprietorship, which a man in his position so soon assumes.

"Well," he says, scanning her face with a fine pretense of criticism.

"Yes."

She makes a slight gesture and laughs.

"Has no one told you that before?" he says.

A faint flush comes to her cheek as she thinks of the number of victims who have affirmed her beauty in various ways eloquent and picturesque. She remembers the last victim, poor Sir Archie, whose eyes if not his lips told her so every minute he spent in her company.

"What does that matter?" she says, with fine impatience and scorn of the past. "The question is—do you think me beautiful?"

"Dulcie," he says, almost calmly, "I think you one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen—and the least vain!"

She laughs softly.

"Vain!" she retorts. "What is the use of being vain? One does not make one's self, and it is nothing to one's credit that one's nose should happen to be straight. Ah, yes!—and, I suppose, with a little spasm, 'it was because of my beauty, as you call it, that you loved me?'"

He nods. He does not know in the least what she is driving at, cannot understand the little anxious line in her white forehead which brings the dark eyebrows close together.

"I suppose so. Yes."

"Yes," she says, with a long breath, "it was for nothing else; it couldn't be, could it? Do you remember the first time we met, how—well, how cold and brusque you were?"

He takes her hand and kisses it with a smile, but a little, uneasy smile.

"Was I?" he says, apologetically and lightly. "I must have been a boor and out of my mind."

"No," she says. "You were quite right. You treated me as I deserved. I suppose you thought that I was—was scarcely a lady?" and her face flushes and pales.

He shrugs his shoulders.

"What does it matter what I thought?" he says. "I didn't know you, you see. Not being gifted with the sense of foreseeing my own fate, I could scarcely be expected to realize that you would be all in all to me. I had not seen your face."

"Ah," she says, and the dark eyes

brows go into a straight line of troubled speculation. "That is it! You had not seen my face! You had only heard my voice, seen my—manner, and were repelled by both!"

He laughs softly, with infinite content.

"What do you mean, Dulcie?" he says. "And come to that, I did love you. I know it now. I loved you the moment you turned and went up the stairs—that is, left me. I suppose I must have felt that I could not be happy without you, for you see I stayed at the same hotel, and actually went to the ball in the hope of seeing you."

"Yes, and were more disgusted than ever," she says, thoughtfully, with a constrained voice and a far-away look in her eyes. "Do you think—suddenly—that I could not read it in your face? I knew what you were thinking by the grim look in your eyes; they spoke plainly enough, and this is what they said: 'A fine girl, and beautiful—but not my style—not the style of the future lady of Castle Holme.'"

It is so exactly what he did think, that he sits and stares at her for a moment; then, as she tries to snatch her hand away, he says, almost impatiently:

"Why do you talk like this, Dulcie? What on earth does it matter what and how I thought or looked on that wretched night? Why do you harrow our lives with the past and done for? The present is the thing; and for the present, I love you—I love you."

She lets him take her hand again, and sighs.

"For the present," she mutters.

"Oh, perverse!" he murmurs, tenderly. "For the present and always!"

She looks at him, a divine tenderness in her face—that is not too often tender, Heaven knows—and her eyes beam upon him.

"Say that again," she says.

He says it again, and holds her tightly to his breast, and to his surprise he feels her sobbing against his heart.

"My darling!"

"Hugh," she says, in a husky, broken, but intense sort of way that thrills him, "remember that you have said it, 'for always!' Remember that, when—the time comes, and you are tempted to forget; for I shall tempt you. Oh, I know it—I know it!" with a little moan. "I shall try you often and often, and you will feel inclined to wish that you had never seen me."

"Dulcie!" reproachfully, incredulously.

"Yes, yes, and yes!" she insists. "You do not know me, and what you do know, you—do not like. I jar on you a thousand times a day; it is only my face that pleases you and makes you love me. I wish—with a sudden pause—"I wish that I had been born plain and dowdy and ugly—I should have been good and gentle and lovable then—all the plain women are."

He laughs, though his heart is troubled, and a grave misgiving tortures him.

"What nonsense, Dulcie!"

(To be Continued.)

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War News

Messages Received Previous to 11 A.M.

BRITISH OFFICIAL.

LONDON, Oct. 3.

Shortly before dawn, the German bombardment of our positions near Tower Hamlets and Polygon. Afterwards his infantry attempted advance. Our artillery opened vigorously and on a great part of the assault broke down by reaching our lines. In the area immediately north of Menin Road a few of the enemy succeeded in passing through the barriers, but were completely repulsed by our infantry. Our positions are intact. There has been great artillery activity on both sides during the day of Ypres. Yesterday the weather again misty, despite which our careful observation was done. A photos were taken, some showing damage by our bombs. Eighteen bombs were dropped on various airbases in Courtrai area and Cambrai. Huts and dumps near rail sidings and at Roulers were successfully attacked and the enemy generally routed. Our fighting planes attacked at long distances. German machines were brought down and four others driven down to control. Six of ours are missing.

BRITISH POSITIONS INTACT.

LONDON, Oct. 3.

An attack by the Germans on morning between Tower Hamlets Polygon Wood, following a heavy artillery fire, was repulsed either by our British infantry. According to a report from Field Marshal Haig to-night all British positions remained intact.

RUSSIAN OFFICIAL.

PETROGRAD, Oct. 3.

To-day's official statement reports there were fusillades on the front. On the Baltic Sea on Monday night the enemy undertook several air raids on Oesel, dropping few bombs which set fire to some oil magazines. Explosions followed and several officers and sailors were extinguishing the fire, whilst as reprisals our planes dropped bombs on camps on the German coast. On Monday evening (local time) appeared in the Irbis Channel. They were repulsed by our coast batteries. Enemy hydroplanes again tried to

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