

Love a Conqueror —OR— WEDDED AT LAST

CHAPTER XXIII.
Sir Hugh Glynn loved Shirley, but his love was selfish and unworthy; it was a mixture of passion and admiration for her beauty and pride piqued by her indifference. Guy's love—the man who hated him felt it keenly—Guy's love was a nobler love than that.

As the thought crossed his mind, the room door opened quietly, and the man he had wronged entered and closed it after him without a word. Sir Hugh stopped his restless perambulations to and fro, and for fully a minute the two men faced each other in utter silence—the betrayed and the betrayer—the man so cruelly wronged and he who had so cruelly wronged him. In a breathless heavy silence, grim and menacing, they looked at each other. Sir Hugh so handsome and stately, for all the suffering which his face showed signs of still, Guy pale, worn, haggard, with a terrible despair on his face—despair which had something reckless in its misery; then Sir Hugh threw back his head with a proud besture of defiance and said calmly—

"This is an unexpected pleasure. After the courtesies we exchanged yesterday, I could hardly have foreseen this visit."

"Perhaps not"—Guy's voice, hoarse and changed and menacing, fell upon the stillness heavily and slowly—"nevertheless I am here, as you see."

"Charmed to have the honor!" Sir Hugh said carelessly; and Guy's gray eyes glistened with a passionate gleam of fury.

"Take care!" he said between his set teeth. "I am in no mood for exchanging civilities; neither am I in a mood to bear your jeers!"

"Then to what am I to attribute the honor that you are paying me?" Sir Hugh asked calmly.

Traitor he was, but not a coward, although just now the sting of his conscience told him that he richly deserved the vengeance which looked out of the furious gray eyes, almost black in their concentrated anger and scorn.

"To what?" Guy repeated. "I will tell you. To my desire for vengeance."

"For vengeance! I do not understand you. Is it on me that you would wreak your anger for your fiancée's infidelity? Is—"

"Only a traitor would shelter himself behind his injuries," said Major Stuart, removing his hand nevertheless. "Can you deny the wrong? trusted you and you betrayed me!"

No reproach could have been more bitter, simple as the words were. Sir Hugh's eyes fell under the other's glance, and he half turned away; then, conquering his momentary remorse, he resumed his old haughty mien.

"That the wrong is irreparable I know!" Guy went on. "And yet, if you were generous—Such a marriage cannot be binding! It is no binding in the sight of Heaven, Glynn, think how I must suffer, not for myself, but for her, when I stoop to entreat you to set her free. Give her back to me. She does not love you," Major Stuart continued hoarsely and brokenly. "And she was all I had, Hugh, for the sake of our old friendship, for the sake—yes, I will stoop to plead it—of the service I rendered you once long ago, renounce your claim upon her! Give Shirley her freedom!"

"It is impossible. She is my wife," said Sir Hugh briefly. "Besides, she herself was willing. She knew her mother's story; she knew the Scottish marriage laws; and, my dear fellow, what you ask is simply an impossibility. Even were it not so, Shirley would never consent."

"How can you persist in that lie?" Major Stuart said, with bitter contempt. "The child's own word would not make me believe her false. Do you think the anguish of yesterday

does not contradict your words? Each one of them is false as falsehood itself. You are a villain and a liar and a traitor!"

"By Heaven, this is unbearable!" cried Sir Hugh furiously, as he sprang forward.

Guy met him with equal fury. One moment more, and they would have been at each other's throat, or struggling in the terrible embrace of two men goaded to desperation who seek vengeance at any cost—one moment more and the stain of blood-guiltiness might have been on the soul of either; but in that moment the door was burst open, and Shirley threw herself between them, pale, breathless, panting, her head uncovered, as she had come from Fairholme Court, her hair, disheveled by her headlong flight through the cold night-wind, falling around her, her eyes wild and dilated with the horror and terror which had seized her.

CHAPTER XXIV.
The two men fell apart at the first touch of the little trembling hands and the eyes of both turned upon the girl, who stood, panting and breathless, both hands pressed against her heart, as if to stop the throbbing which seemed as if they must rend it in twain, her face wild and haggard shaded by her loosened hair, a faint little inarticulate cry of terror escaping from the pale parted lips.

Captain Fairholme, who had paused at the door, went forward quietly, and put Shirley gently into a chair and her head fell back against it in utter exhaustion.

"Has she not suffered enough yet?" said Oswald, gravely. "Could you no have spared her this?"

He had turned to Guy, who stood breathing heavily from the restraint he had been forced to place upon himself; but, before he could answer, Shirley looked up quickly and put out one little hand with a deprecating gesture of entreaty which made Sir Hugh's eyes flash. Even now she was pitiful over her lover, he thought bitterly.

"No; do not," she said faintly—"do not blame him, Oswald. He has borne so much, and he has so much to bear. Guy—she rose feebly and put her hand upon his arm—"try to forgive me, dear, and go home with Oswald."

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The words were careless, haughty, mocking in their intonation; but they died upon his lips as Guy rested his hand upon his shoulder, swaying him to and fro with resistless power.

"Take care," he said, "or I will force the words back through your glib lips with one blow of my hand."

Low as the words were spoken there was a fierce suppressed passion in their low-breathed utterance which made Sir Hugh Glynn quail for a moment; but his steel eyes, flashing with a steel-like glitter, met Guy's unflinchingly.

"It is not vengeance, but justice," Major Stuart said, in the same low tones—"justice only. Would an vengeance be as great as my wrong?"

"Th! You have been to Edinburgh?"

"Yes."

"And you have seen the lawyer you wished to consult?"

"Yes."

"And their opinion is?" Sir Hugh interrogated calmly, although the pitiless hand still kept its iron grip on his shoulder.

"You know it well," Guy said, with a sudden irrepressible burst of pain "I need not repeat it."

There was a moment's silence. They were standing on the rug now, and the red flames of the great log-fire as it roared up the wide chimney fell upon either face.

"There was no need to go," Major Stuart said hoarsely. "You took your measures well. She is your wife, poor unhappy girl; but for your treachery to me, your friend, for your baseness to her, a poor child who trusted you, you shall answer to the uttermost, so help me Heaven!"

"That I am in your power, know," Sir Hugh answered calmly. "One-armed man will be powerless in deed against such strength as yours I have wronged you, you say; then take your revenge."

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perhaps—I think, I hope, I pray that you may forget me and be happy. But first will you—can you forgive me?"

"How can you speak of forgiveness between you and me, Shirley?" he answered unsteadily. "There can be none ever needed, my child!"

"I did not think you would be angry with me," she said, with a touching childlike confidence in her voice. "But Guy, if you wish it, I will tell you why I went."

"There is no need, my dearest," he answered gently, taking both her little hands in his, while Sir Hugh looked on, angry and jealous and furious, yet powerless to interfere. "I trust you."

"Thank you, Guy. And—and—you will try to forget?"

"To forget! Ah, Shirley, is that possible? While I have life, I must remember, my child!"

"We were very happy," she whispered brokenly, a smile pitiful to see curving the stiff vivid lips. "It is something to have been happy together—even for a few hours, Guy!"

"We were very happy together, Shirley," he answered hoarsely, looking down with dim eyes at the ghastly face and the great hazel eyes glittering with a bright feverish lustre—"very happy, my poor darling."

"And last night I was thinking," she went on, in the same pitiful trusting manner, "that you might by and by have tired of such a foolish girl, and that it was better—I could not think very clearly, Guy," she added, resting her head against his arm, with a little gesture of weariness which was unutterably pathetic, "my head ached so—it aches so now."

Sir Hugh made a quick movement toward her, but Oswald Fairholme put his hand upon his arm.

"Have some pity," he said, huskily; and Sir Hugh, involuntarily obeying his movement, drew back and turned away.

Oswald put his hand through his arm and gently forced him to the window, where he threw himself moodily into a chair, his eyes fixed on the group by the fire, while Oswald hid his face with his hand to shut out the two despairing faces which haunted him. Shirley had rested her head against Guy's shoulder, and was looking up into his face with restless hining eyes, while her fingers, with a strange uncertain movement, strayed over his rough utter. Major Stuart had put his arm round her, but he could not trust himself to look upon her face, and he had turned away his head, while under his heavy mustache his lips were set sternly and tightly, and in his brain the question repeated itself—Could any vengeance be too great for such wrongs as his and hers?

"Guy," the sweet low voice went on, while the restless eyes wandered from his face round the room and came back again to their first resting place, "won't you speak to me, dear? I thought all day that when you came back you would look as you look now. I saw your face all night—all night. Did you sleep, Guy? It seems to me as if I should never sleep again—my head burns so, and my eyes will not close. They told you, did they not, that I was his wife? I knew they would say so. His wife—oh, great Heaven!" She clung to him in a paroxysm of terror at the thought, the only clear one now in her bewildered brain. "I am not his wife—it is impossible! No, no, Guy, do not leave me to him—take me away—take me away!"

(To be Continued.)

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