

Love a Conqueror
—OR—
WEDDED AT LAST.
CHAPTER XLVIII.

"I reminded her of them, poor child, in her misery," Sir Hugh continued. "You know how I drove her to Dumfries and passed there as her husband; the little note which was such conclusive evidence in my favor she wrote me, quite unaware how greatly it would tell against herself. I knew, and Latrelle knew, that when we left the inn she was my wife by the laws of Scotland; but she, I need hardly tell you was as ignorant as a child of what had been done. When I left her at the Court, I put my lips to her cheek with a laughing little speech which she did not understand but she shrank from me with a little cry of pain which made me feel ashamed and furious at once. Then I went away. The accident I met with prostrated me for weeks, and the preparations for your marriage went on; and when I could spare Latrelle to go and see what was doing, the wedding day was fixed, and I had— Yes, I know that the rest need not be told; but Stuart, if I could have undone it then, I would. Great Heaven, shall I ever forget Shirley's face when she shrank from me? I think I saw then for the first time the heinousness of the sin I had committed."

He fell back upon the pillows, faint and exhausted, and Guy brought water and bathed his temples and raised him on his arm, as tenderly as a woman would have done, and, as he revived, he looked up and smiled faintly into the grave eyes.

"Those were not happy years," he continued brokenly; "how could they be? How could the poor girl be happy with a man whom she could not respect? She failed in none of her duties; but I know how she suffered. How often have I watched the misery on her face when she thought herself unobserved, and the tears which lay upon her cheeks when she had cried herself to sleep! Never, until you had spoken to her, had she treated me with anything but coldness; and I could not complain. I knew that I deserved even worse at her hands. My poor Shirley! And then you came back, Guy, and you forgave me so nobly and so generously, and after a time you induced her to think more gently of me and to forgive me. That night at Easton—ah, shall I ever forget it? She told me that she had forgiven me, that she would try—poor darling!—to be a better wife to me; and I cried like a child to think that there might be happy days in store for us both—thanks to you."

"Dear old Hugh—poor fellow!" "I had deserved to be miserable. Guy. Even now my punishment has not equalled my sin," he said pitifully. "Let me continue. I had dismissed Latrelle as soon as Shirley came to Maxwell. She was ill for weeks, as you know. Think, old fellow, how sad it was for one who loved her to know that the illness was all caused

by him! When she was better, we went abroad, and I heard no more of Latrelle for some time. I had paid him liberally for aiding and abetting my villainy—I must call it so, Guy—there is no better word—and he was spending the money and enjoying himself; but a couple of years after he reappeared, demanding, rather than begging, assistance. Several times I gave him sums of money; but at last, wearied with his importunity, I refused. He then threatened me; if I did not accede to his demands, he would publish the whole story of the Scotch marriage and my treachery, and disgrace me. I have always been a coward, Guy. I was a coward then. Again and again I gave him money, at times large sums, and he grew more and more insolent when he saw the cowardly wretch with whom he had to deal. His letters and constant reappearance made my life miserable. I hoped that you, and perhaps Shirley herself, might be induced to think that the marriage had not been a voluntary act, and that I had been ignorant of what I was doing. I was maddened by the fellow's threats and insolence; and when I told him to do his worst, the world

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would not believe him, he said that the world would believe you, and that you would make it public. It was just at this time that he went to Easton, and it was you who casually mentioned having seen him passing the hotel. I knew then that he had followed me. Late that night, when I was alone on the balcony, feeling grateful—Heaven knows how grateful—for the wondrous happiness which seemed to be opening for me, and he passed again, looked up and accosted me. I went down to him, and he renewed his entreaties and threats, and, fearing that my new-found happiness would be destroyed by his means, I agreed to meet him the next morning on the cliffs.

"Hugh, rest now," Guy entreated, as he saw the exhaustion and faintness which Sir Hugh struggled against so bravely. "You shall tell me the remainder another time." "There may be no other time for me," he said sadly. "The best thing I can do is to die and leave her free and perhaps Heaven will let me do it. No; let me tell you now; and then, when you know all, I will rest. You remember," he continued, after a long pause of weakness, "how we started together—shall I ever forget Shirley as she stood on the balcony that morning?—and how, as we walked across the beach together, I tried to thank you for what you had done for me. I never loved you as I loved you then, Guy. Even in our boyhood, when we had been such friends, you had never been so dear to me; and I stood and watched you out of sight, and sat on the rocks waiting for him. When he came, I saw at once that he was prepared to be insolent, and I resolved to be firm with him. I had brought with me two hundred pounds in gold and notes that Pears had brought me down a day or two before, which I intended to give him as a last bribe. He was in a most in-

solent mood; he had left the inn in the neighboring village where he had been staying, saying he would not return, and he made up his mind to speak to you. But even the taunting words and insults were no excuse for my anger. I turned upon him at last, and lifted the stick—your stick, old fellow, which I had asked you for for a keepsake—oh, how sorry I was for that afterward!—and struck him. He fell immediately to the ground, and never spoke afterward. I had—oh, merciful Heaven, I had killed him on the spot!"

Sir Hugh covered his face with his trembling hands, and lay back, shuddering violently, the cold dew gathering on his forehead, his whole frame shaking with horror and anguish. Guy, scarcely less agitated, could hardly utter the few words of consolation he strove to speak; and there were a few moments silence ere Hugh Glynn resumed the pitiful story.

"Heaven knows I had no intention to hurt him," he went on, with an accent of unutterable sadness; "and when I saw him lying there, I had no thought but that he was stunned or had fainted. I knelt down by him, and did all I could to restore him, but of course, in vain. Then, when I realized what I had done, when I found myself a murderer, with the stain of blood upon me, I went mad, I think I had but one idea—to escape; and then a horrible notion entered my head. If I could disgrace him enough— Oh, Guy, Guy!"

For a few moments there was no sound in the room but the uncontrollable weeping which broke from the baronet and rent his weak frame with terrible sobs; Guy's face too was hidden—he was trying to shut out the awful scene which the words conjured up. It was indeed an awful one—the dead man lying with his face upturned, the sky overhead, the sea beyond, and the murderer trying to es-

cape the results of his crime. If it might so be called. "You know how well I succeeded," continued Sir Hugh, when he could speak. "I took off his coat and put mine on him; the clothes he was wearing had been mine once—I saw that directly. I put my ring on his finger, and all that I had about me which could lead to recognition I put into his pockets, and then I left him there. I never imagined but that it would be thought an accident; and I did it with an awful calmness which I think of sometimes now and wonder at. My one thought was to escape. I shrank with an unutterable horror from what was before me if I gave myself up, although now I can see that I ought to have done so. I had plenty of money—that was one difficulty removed; and I walked to the nearest station, carrying the bag Latrelle had with him, and took a third class ticket for London, which I reached late that night—that terrible night. Do you remember the storm? Will you ever forget it, Guy? The next morning my first action was to disguise myself effectually," he went on, after a long pause. "With money, in London, it was not difficult; and then I took quiet lodgings in a part of the town where I had never been in the old days; and for a time I remained there, ill and weak with a nervous fever, during the continuance of which, however, I was never light-headed. Strangely enough, I had no fear of pursuit; I knew the poor fellow would not be missed, and I felt sure that the body would be taken for mine. One day—the very first time I was able to read a newspaper—to my inexpressible horror, I saw what a mistake had been made—what a terrible mistake!"

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