

Love a Conqueror

—OR—
WEDDED AT LAST.

CHAPTER XXXVI.
"That—oh, Guy, I cannot tell you do not ask me. Help me—help me!"
There was a moment's silence. Guy Stuart had no need to hear the words to know her meaning; and yet he could not, he would not understand. "What is it, Shirley? Tell me, dear. You are breaking my heart with this suspense," he whispered huskily. "What can it be that you find so difficult to tell me?"

"I love you—I love you!" she moaned feebly.

"Is that so hard to say, Shirley?" he said, a faint smile parting his lips for a moment.

"Not that, not that, but—"
Her head sank yet more heavily against him, the breath came from her lips in heavy gasps, her brow was damp and cold; she was physically unable to tell him, she had strength only to suffer and to cling to him with trembling weak little hands, as she rested against him. But in all her misery she was conscious of the loud passionate throbbing of his heart, and the unsteadiness of his hands; and she felt with a strong intuition the look in his eyes which she could not meet.

"Well, dear?" Guy said softly, although her evident agitation cut him to the heart.

"Guy, you must—"

"What must I, my dearest?"

"You must—oh, Heaven, this is horrible!" she moaned in her misery suffering too greatly now even to think of his pain.

The words came as if each required an effort, and low as her voice was, each syllable was distinct and clear.

"You must—oh, Heaven, this is never—see—me—again!"

"I must go away, and never see you again!" he echoed, forcing a smile. "What folly is this, my little one?"

"It is not folly," she said faintly. "It is the truth, Guy."

"That I am to go away," he questioned, trying to lift her head and look into her face, "and never see you again, Shirley? Let me look at your face and see if your eyes tell me the same foolish thing which your lips utter."

She lifted her face and looked at him; and Guy knew then her determination, and felt that she would hold to it if it cost her her life. Her face was ghastly pale and drawn.

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with suffering; but in the dim eyes there was an expression of agony, renunciation, and anguish which he never forgot.

"I do not understand you, Shirley," he said gently. "Why must I go?"
"Guy, dearest, do not make it so hard for me," she answered pitifully. "Can I—can I add shame to your name?"

"My name! It is dishonored already," he said passionately. "For Heaven's sake, Shirley, let there be entire frankness between us now. Is it that you no longer love me?"
"Ah, how soon you doubt me!" she rejoined, with a smile sadder to see than any tears. "And only a few moments ago you said that nothing could make you do so."

"But, my darling, what am I to think?" he said hoarsely.

"You must think—the sweet voice was low and broken and faint, but so full of music in its tenderness—"that I love you too well to bring disgrace upon you. Oh, my love, think! Could we—could we give the world what they call a certain proof of—of our guilt?"

"What does it matter?" he asked bitterly. "They will think me guilty; Shirley, if you love me, you will not send me away."

"Ah, my dearest, it is because I love you that I send you away!" she murmured faintly; and, with a sudden anger flashing into his gray eyes, he removed his arms from around her and half turned away.

A little cry of pain broke from her, and she slipped down upon her knees at his feet, bowing her head upon her arms in an agony of grief and shame. Guy stood looking at her for a moment in silence; then, turning away from her, he threw himself into a chair and covered his face.

After all he had suffered, after years of desolation and loneliness, after shame and disgrace and misery, this was the end! A foolish scruple.

room, on her knees, to his side and lifted her little fingers and tried to remove his hands from his face.

"Guy," she moaned pitifully, "Guy, won't you speak to me—only one word?"

"What can I say?" he said huskily, removing his hands and looking at her with eager, passionate, sorrowful eyes. "What can I say, my poor child? Perhaps you are right. But, Shirley, let people say what they will; if we are happy—and I together, my own—we can give the world the go-by. We can go abroad, you and I, where no one will know us; in happier climes we will forget all this misery, and we will not mind that here in England they say that you have married the man who murdered your—oh, great Heaven, it is too horrible—it will drive me mad!"

"Guy—oh, Guy, my dearest, hush!" she implored, seeing how agitated he was. "Oh, my poor darling, I wish—I wish we had never met!"

The words were wrung from her breaking heart as she stood, trembling and pale, watching the strong man's agony. What, after all, was her suffering to him? What could her pain be to that which brought such a ghastly pallor to his face and such drops of agony to his brow, which made him stagger as he crossed the room, to throw open the window and lean out into the cold night air, for he felt stifled and choking in the little room? After a few minutes he came back to where she stood and took her once more into his arms.

"Shirley," he said very tenderly, and with the weariness of a great suffering on his face, "we will not discuss this any more now; we are both unfit for any further agitation, and we cannot talk this over dispassionately and calmly to-night. Besides, it is getting late, and you want rest, my poor wounded bird. But at another time, my own, you must let me persuade you that you are wrong, that there is no trouble, no disgrace, no shame that cannot be lessened if you share them with me. And I do not think it is selfish in me to urge you, dear, because, even if you share the disgrace and the name I offer you is a dishonored one, I think my love is great enough to make up for it all. And now—his voice, grave and weakened by suffering, faltered a little here—"I will say good-night, my own love, and leave you to your rest."

He stooped over her with a tenderness which almost broke down, the composure she had striven so hard to attain; and, lifting her hands, she clasped them about his neck.

"Guy," she whispered, "you will do something to please me, will you not?"

"What is there I would not do, my own?" he questioned gently, smoothing the soft hair on her brow, and looking down with intense love into the sweet, changed lovely face.

"This will not be difficult," she answered, smiling faintly. "It is only—Do you sleep well at night, Guy? Your eyes look so tired and worn. Are your nights bad?"

"I have been rather restless lately, dear; but of course that was only natural."

(To be Continued.)

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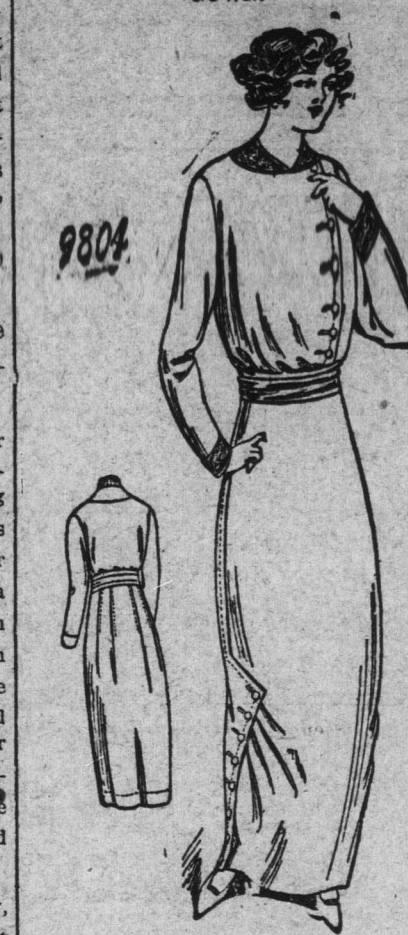
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