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Love a Conqueror

—OR—  
WEDDED AT LAST!

CHAPTER VI.  
"And do you imagine that Shirley is flirting?" asked Alice, softly. "You are utterly mistaken, Sir Hugh; she is quite in earnest, and I hope, for her sake, that Major Stuart is equally so. Why, Shirley could not flirt! She does not know the meaning of the word."  
"Then she is very unlike most of her sex," said Sir Hugh moodily. "With such a face as hers, she need not be long in ignorance. I should think."  
"Such a face as hers! Do you think her so very pretty?"  
"Pretty is not the word," he answered quietly. "She is extremely beautiful."  
Alice Fairholme bit her lip.  
"Yes, she is beautiful, I think," she said, with apparent frankness—"although some people think her too pale. My poor aunt, her mother, was very beautiful, I believe, but I never saw her."  
"How was that. It is not three years since her death, I understand."  
"Not three years yet—oh, no; but I have never been abroad, you know."  
"And did Mrs. Ross never come to Scotland?" he asked, with some interest.  
"No—never." Alice said gravely, with a faint little sigh.  
"Never! Why? Pardon my curiosity, Miss Fairholme, but really it

seems to me that it was very strange not to return even for a time to her native land."  
"es, very strange indeed," Alice said softly. "There is some sad story connected with it, I think," she added. "I do not know what it is, because my father and mother have never spoken of it to me; but I was always aware, even in my childhood, of some mystery which surrounded Aunt Marian. Of course I should not speak so frankly to any one but you," she concluded, with a swift upward glance.  
Sir Hugh murmured something expressive of his gratitude for the confidence, and relapsed into silence. Alice felt rather annoyed and irritated. What right had this man to show so much interest in what regarded Shirley? Well, if appearances were to be credited, he would not be able to show that interest much longer, or to any purpose—for Alice's quick eyes had immediately discerned that there was something unusually tender in Major Stuart's manner toward her cousin.  
"Shirley, can't you give us some music?" she asked, languidly. "Try that new song Oswald sent you."  
"I could not sing to-day," Shirley said, flushing and trembling a little. "Pray excuse me, Alice."  
"Cannot sing to-day—why? Have you a cold?"  
"Oh, no; but—"  
"But what? Don't be lazy, child! You never sing now," said Alice, pettishly.  
"Oh, do sing us something!" Ruby echoed. "You used not to be so chary of your music, Shirley."  
"Will you accept an unworthy substitute?" said Guy Stuart, smiling. "Shall I play you something, Miss

"Fairholme?"  
"You will be very kind if you take pity on us," Major Stuart, returned Alice, sweetly. "Sir Hugh looks tired and out of sorts, or I would press him into the service; but when you have played, perhaps Shirley will favor us."  
Major Stuart went to the piano, which stood in a recess facing the mantelpiece, and sat down. He was a good musician, and presently, as his fingers strayed over the keys, a flood of soft rich melody filled the quiet room. Mr. Rivers and the two girls ceased their chatter, Alice closed her eyes and leaned back languidly in her deep arm-chair, Sir Hugh pulled nervously at his long fair mustache and watched Shirley furtively as she sat with her hands clasped idly on her lap, her face turned toward the piano, and a little smile upon her lips.  
How beautiful she was—how rarely, wonderfully beautiful. In all his life he had seen no woman whose beauty had so impressed and charmed him as hers did. Could it be that he had lost her? Could it be that Guy Stuart had won what he would have given so much to possess? Sir Hugh gazed at his teeth hard together at the thought. It was impossible. He should not have her. She should be his. That very evening he would ask her to be his wife.  
It had been his purpose to do so from the first day he had seen her. As she stood in her simple serge dress in the doorway, with a knot of red berries at her breast, she had seemed to him most beautiful and greatly to be prized. He, Hugh Gynn, avowed opponent of marriage as he was, had then and there resolved to make her his wife. But he had been in no hurry; he felt so safe, so secure. This dowdless beauty would be only too glad to accept him whenever he chose to make her the offer and meanwhile it was very pleasant to treat her with graceful courtesy, not untouched by tenderness, which he knew could not but be grateful to the lovely girl, while he flirted a little with Miss Fairholme perhaps with an unavowed—even to himself—intention of making Shirley jealous.  
But while he had been hesitating another had come forward and had stolen her from him; and although it was no theft—since she had never

been his except in his thoughts—Hugh Gynn felt passionately resentful against the friend who had forestalled him.  
Presently the music ceased; and Alice after thanking the musician, again turned to Shirley; and the girl rose dreamily and went over to the recess. Guy still retaining his seat, turned with a smile to her.  
"Are you going to sing?" he said, softly; and Hugh Gynn's eager eyes caught her tender little glance and smile.  
"Yes," she said shyly; and as he gave her the music stool, his hand touched hers gently for a moment.  
"What shall I sing?" asked Shirley, bending over the piano.  
"The new song you were practicing this morning," said Ruby Capel gaily. "It is freight, you know, and your back is turned to us, so that no one will see your blushes."  
"Yes, that song of Blumenthal's which Oswald sent you," said Alice. Shirley hesitated for a moment, and then with a swift sudden smile which no one could see, for her face was turned to the piano, she began to sing; and the words of her song sank into two hearts there with very different effect.

"She has not found her king as yet: The golden days, the golden days glide by: They bring no grief, no grief she should forget, Nor any cause to sigh. No heart for her devotion made. No heart the passionate summers bring. Unharm'd she walks and unafraid: She has not found her king."  
"Men bring their titles and their gold— She turns in scorn away: That man must be of different mold She swears she will obey. Titled by gift of God is he. And rich in a rarer thing than wealth."  
Thrt unknown man must be Whom she will own her king.  
"But, when he comes, as come he will, Strong to support and grand, With supplication that shall fill Her soul like a command. She'll place her hand in his And take what'er the world may bring. Proud and content, contented for his sake Whom she hath made her king."  
The rich contralto voice, so beautifully soft and sweet, and so highly cultivated, died dreamily away, and Shirley rose from the piano.  
"Thank you, my darling!" Major Stuart whispered softly, and their eyes met for a moment, hers so sweet and fond, his so proud and tender; then Shirley moved over to the fire. At the same moment the dressing-bell sounded, and the girls started up.  
"I am afraid she was just a little bit of a prig," Ruby said laughingly. "But it is a very pretty song, Shirley."

"Judging by the words, it would be advisable not to find a king at all," remarked Sir Hugh carelessly, "since before he came she had  
"No grief she should forget. Nor any cause to sigh."  
"Treason to your sex, Sir Hugh!" said Alice gaily. "Come along, girls; mamma likes us to be in time, you know."  
The girls trooped off, laughing and chatting as they went, their quick light steps sounding clearly over the oaken floor. Mr. Rivers soon followed, and the two friends were left alone.

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For a moment they stood in silence, looking down at the red glow of the fire; then Sir Hugh took the fur-trimmed coat he had put aside, and humming softly as he went, moved away. At the door Guy's voice arrested him.  
"Wait one minute, old fellow—I have something to tell you."  
Sir Hugh paused; for a moment he put his hand on the oaken frame of the door as if he needed support, then he turned quickly and made a few steps in the room.

"What is it?" he asked quietly.  
"I wanted to tell you—What is the matter, Hugh? Are you ill?" said Guy, hastily.  
"Ill? No, of course not. What is it, Stuart? I have a letter to write before dinner."  
"Do you remember my telling you that we might meet our fates at Fairholme Court?" Guy said with a smile. "I don't know about you, Hugh, but I have met mine."  
"Caught!" exclaimed Sir Hugh with a forced laugh. "Who is it, Guy? Miss Capel?"  
"No, of course not," said Guy, looking surprised. "Why do you guess her, Hugh?"  
"I fancied you admired her more than Miss Montolieu," Sir Hugh answered carelessly. "But, if it is Miss Montolieu, I congratulate you—sincerely, for she's a pretty girl, and a belle to boot."  
"It is not Miss Montolieu," said Major Stuart, somewhat gravely. "It is Shirley Ross."  
"Shirley Ross!" Sir Hugh exclaimed, in an accent of intense surprise which struck Guy Stuart almost painfully.  
"Yes," he said simply. "You seem very much surprised, Hugh."  
"I am very much surprised," returned Sir Hugh, gravely; and there was a short silence.  
"Why are you so astonished, Hugh?" Major Stuart asked then. "I know that I am unworthy, but—"  
"My dear Guy, it is not that. I fancied—but I was wrong, of course—that Miss Ross, with her great beauty, would look out for a rich man, that—"  
"But she has consented to take a poor one, you see," finished Guy, smiling. "You may safely congratulate me, Hugh."  
"I will wish you all happiness, old fellow," Sir Hugh said, cordially; but being encumbered with his heavy coat, perhaps he did not see Major Stuart's outstretched hand. "I always think that congratulations should be kept till one sees how the marriage turns out. I will keep mine till then."  
(To be continued.)

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