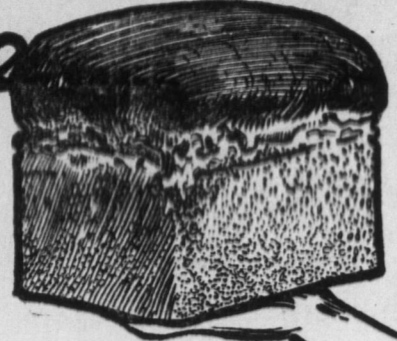


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Love a Conqueror

—OR— WEDDED AT LAST.

CHAPTER XLVI.

But Jack was not thinking of his sister on that bright winter day when he knelt at Madge Oliphant's feet to put on her skates. For once Shirley was forgotten, with all the misery of the past and the wretched uncertainty and suspense of the present. Guy's words had lifted a load from the young man's heart, and he felt unusually cheerful and light-hearted. Something, too, in Madge Oliphant's manner, in the look in her blue eyes, made him hope that he was not quite indifferent to her, and it was a bright as well as a handsome face which looked up into hers with such significance in the earnest tender eyes. Jack Ross was feeling what the quaint old song so well expresses:

"To-day, to-day, where'er I pass,
A glory lightens through the grass;
A glory weights the flower;
A glory lies on the shining grass,
A glory crowns the burnished flower.

"To-day, to-day, where'er I look,
Soft laughter dimples o'er the brook;
Glad smiles break on the air;

Light laughter shines o'er the wimp-ling brook,
And smiles shine out in the sunny air."

Never had scenery looked so lovely to Jack as that of Lee Park, never had there been such a delightful piece of ice to skate upon as the lake; never had there been such a bright winter sky; and, above all, never had man had a sweeter companion to skate with than Madge Oliphant! It was not that she was a very graceful and capable skater; Madge, like many another English girl, was only sufficiently adept to glide smoothly over the lake, and she was, moreover, rather timid. It was very delightful to Jack—himself as accomplished a skater as any Canadian could be—to feel the little hands tightening over his arm, and to meet the sweet alarmed blue eyes as they looked up confidently into his, and Madge had never had so careful and expert and tender a teacher as she found in him; while Sir Frederick having satisfied himself that his daughter was in good hands, sauntered off with Lord Lee to the house for a quiet talk.

"You are getting on famously, Miss Oliphant," said Jack, as they rested for a few moments. "If the ice continues for a few days more, you will have mastered the outside edge!" "Thank you!" cried Madge brightly. "I am afraid I must be a terrible bore, Mr. Ross. You cannot possibly

enjoy yourself towing me about like this."

"Can't I?" Jack said, smiling into the demure blue eyes. "At any rate, I manage to bear the infliction with equanimity."

"That is so considerate of you," Madge rejoined lightly. "Confess, though, that you would much prefer gliding off by yourself."

"Why should I confess to what certainly would not be true, Miss Oliphant?"

"Would it not? It is really very good of you to help me!"

"It is very good of you to let me do so," Jack answered, with an involuntary pressure of the little hand which still lay in his. "I see scores of envious individuals looking after us."

"Young ladies envying me the happiness of assisting you," he answered earnestly; and the sweet saucy blue eyes dropped under his earnest glance.

"Shall we go on, Mr. Ross?" she said, a little abruptly.

"If you have rested," he answered, rather regretfully.

"Oh, I have quite rested! But perhaps you are tired of being a 'supporter'."

"You know that I am not," he replied; and they glided away together, many eyes, as he had said, following them with envious or admiring looks. For Miss Oliphant, both as beauty and heiress, had a little train of admirers who usually followed her and danced attendance upon her; and some of the young ladies of the neighborhood would not have been averse from a flirtation with the handsome, fair-haired, bronzed stranger who seemed to have eyes for no one but Madge.

"Do you know that you look like Balzac's femme peinte par elle-meme?" he said, smiling, after a minute's silence.

"Do I?" she answered, laughing, and putting up her hands to her face with the prettiest, shyest gesture possible.

"Ah, I know that rouge won't come off!" he said lightly. "I am glad to see that you are not very tired."

"I am not a bit tired," she answered gayly. "But I am wondering what has become of mamma and Guy."

"Perhaps Lady Oliphant was tired, and preferred to go back."

"I should not be a bit surprised. Will you not sit down, Mr. Ross?"

"Thank you," Jack answered, and took the offered seat by her side; then Madge's roses deepened and Mr. Ross's blue eyes looked as if nothing could induce them to leave her face.

For a few minutes neither spoke; a sudden fit of dumbness seemed to

have fallen upon the pretty chatter-box by Jack's side, and he himself was at no time a very great talker. Still it was he who broke the silence first.

"Miss Oliphant," he said, rather unsteadily, "may I tell you an episode of my past life?"

Madge started, and the pretty roses faded just a little.

"It is something that I want to know," he said very gently; "for, although our acquaintance has not been a long one, I should like you to know the worst of me at once."

"The worst!" Madge said, looking startled.

"Yes, I think you know my poor sister's story—do you not?"

Madge hesitated.

"I know that she was engaged to poor Guy, and that she married Sir Hugh Glynn," she said gently; "but that is all—and that she was very unhappy."

"Her life was spoiled through my fault," said Jack gravely. "Had I been an honest man, Shirley would have been a happy woman now."

"An honest man!" Madge repeated gently, not shrinking from him as he had expected her to do.

"Yes, let me tell you," he said eagerly; "and, when I have related it to you, you will know why I wished you to hear the story."

He told her gravely and earnestly, without trying to excuse or palliate his own wrong-doing, of the foolish and guilty action which had so nearly been his ruin, and which indirectly had caused all poor Shirley's misery; and Madge listened with a touched, sorrowful expression on her face and a deep sympathy in the blue eyes which, so bright when he began were dim and misty when he ended.

It was a painful story; and the revelation of her own feelings toward Jack which had come to her that morning made her feel for the suffering Shirley had endured, and helped her perhaps to understand it better than she could otherwise have done.

"Ah, poor thing, poor thing!" she said brokenly. "How terrible for her, loving one man to be married to another!"

"Yes, and married by a fraud, by a— He is dead—I would not speak in anger now," Jack said, checking himself suddenly. "And you see it was all my fault, Miss Oliphant."

"Yes," Madge said very softly; "but however great a fault it is, it is never too great for repentance, and you repented it sorely."

"My repentance could not give Shirley back her lost happiness," he exclaimed gloomily. "When I think," he added, with sudden passion, "of three lives blighted by my sin, it—"

"Hush, hush!" Madge said gently. "You must not talk so. You must try to forget it. Your sister suffered in silence, that this burden of remorse might not be laid upon you; is it right of you, or grateful toward her, to go mourning all your days for a sin which you have so repented?"

(To be continued.)

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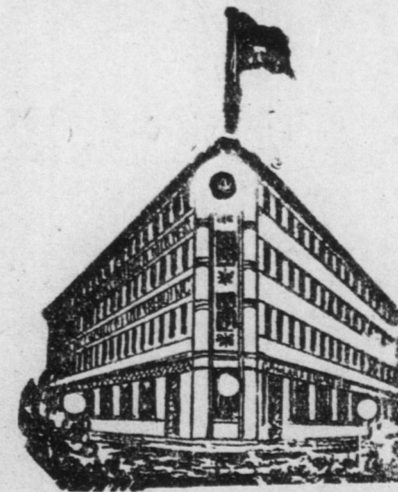
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