The Sound of Wedding Bells

— OR —

Won After Great Perseverance!

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Dear Lucy, you know you are a great favorite with the duke," remonstrates Maud, patronizingly. "I am sure he never seems so happy as when he is talking with you. And—why dear, he asked after you to-day quite impressively."

"Did he?" with a smile of ironical amusement playing about the thin lips. "Did he really? That was very kind of him, dear. But of course he only did it to please you."

"If he did, he did right then," says Maud, already triumphant and condescending. "He knows how fond we all are of you, Lucy, dear, and I hope when you and Hugh have quite made up your minds, that—that—why, Lucy, perhaps he might give you away."

"Really, dear! Do you really mean it?" exclaims the soft voice, in an ecstasy of gratitude. "How sweetly thoughtful of you to think of that, you dear Maud! Fancy being given away by a duke, and the Duke of Gretnam!"

"Yes, he shall," says Maud, effusively. "He shall, Lucy, dear. I am sure he would do anything for me—I mean," pulling herself up, "he is so kind and amiable."

"My dear, the Duke of Gretnam is kindness itself, and you are a very lucky girl. But, Maud, if——" thoughtfully.

"Well, dear?"

"He hasn't spoken yet?"

"Not a word, dear; that is—no, not a word."

"Then, Maud; but I don't like to offer you what sounds like advice."

"Do, dear—do."

"Then I think, if I were you, I wouldn't seem too—too—what shall I say?—too complaisant and easy. If there is any truth in proverbs, men always grow keener the harder the hunt. That sounds awfully worldly, doesn't it?"

"Yes," says Maud, with her head on one side; "but I think I know what you mean, dear."

"Don't let the duke think he can have what he wants for the mere asking, dearest. Avoid him a little for a few days; you will see that he will be all the more eager, and the word will be spoken."

Maud thinks for a moment.

"That sounds like good advice dear," she says. "I shall take it. How kind of you, Lucy, to think of me. But—but if you had seen him to-day—he was so kind and attentive, and when he was going away he pressed my hand. Oh, by the way, he sent a message to you!"

"To me, dear?" carelessly.

"Yes. He said he wanted you to go with me and him to the French gallery to-morrow."

"Oh, I see!" says Lucy, with a little laugh.

"That would be one for me, and two for you. He merely wants me to act as chaperon. Of course I'll go, dear, and be quite a mamma to you."

"Dear Lucy," murmurs unsuspecting Maud, and as she gets up, so suddenly that she almost catches the sarcastic smile on the thin lips, she puts her rather "scraggy" arms round Lucy's neck and kisses her.

Then Maud, triumphant and elated, feeling already a ducal coronet pressing upon her brow, goes off to dress. Lucy Fairfax sinks into a chair, and leaning back laughs long and softly, as the actor might laugh who has played a part so well as almost to deceive himself.

But she is still undecided.

CHAPTER XXX.

To Hugh's surprise, the days of his probation pass anything but slowly. When a man is requested by the lady to whom he has offered his hand and heart to wait a week before he receives his refusal or acceptance of the same, he generally spends that week in a fervor of unrest and impatience.

But Hugh feels neither restless nor lacking in patience. As he sits in the solitude of his chamber at the Albany, or goes to and fro to the War Office, he is conscious of a feeling of annoyance that he is so patient and content.

"I suppose," he muses, "it is because I have known Lucy for so long, and learned to regard her as my future wife."

But then he sighs and shakes his head, for he knows that it is because the old ardor of love has died out with him. It died that night in the fernery at Holme Castle, when he said "good-bye" to the girl who had won his heart, and, as he thought and still thinks, played with and threw it from her.

It is a solitary life he leads, for Hugh is not a sociable man. He drops in at his club, it is true, for an hour or two; but he generally sits in the library and writes his letters, or looks at the papers, rarely engages in conversation, and never joins the whist table.

The one constant friend, Archie, he has only seen twice since he has been in town—once when he saw him beside Dulcie, and once again when they met in Pall Mall.

Met almost as strangers, for Archie had just said, "How do you do?" and Hugh had merely nodded.

It is a solitary life, and he spends it, as a soldier always spends a term of enforced idleness, in longing for the old days of battle.

"If there were a big war on," he murmurs, "I could go in for it and—forget. But this perpetual grinding of the social treadmill will not help a man to forget—will do nothing but tire and sicken him of the whole business."

But, soldier-like, he does his duty. He calls daily at Park Lane, and goes the dreary round of concert and ballroom with Edie and Maud, for, strange to say, Lucy, during this week of suspense, is rather chary of her company.

She generally pleads a headache, or the necessity of keeping Lady Falconer company.

"She is so lonely when they are all away," she murmurs, when Hugh presses her.

"Well, then," he says, with some reason, "let Maud or Edie stop home to-day?"

But she shakes her head and smiles up at him shyly.

"No, take the girls, dear Hugh," she murmurs. "They like going about and—and—perhaps you will have too much of me in the future! Mind, I only say 'perhaps.'"

And Hugh, too chivalrous to press her, does as he is bid.

He does not guess that, while they are all away at concert or ball, the duke, dressed with the greatest care by his valet, generally "drops" in and spends an hour or two seated by the little figure in the plain dress.

But the week is nearly at an end, and the duke has not spoken. Several camellias have been added to the one in the vase which stands on Lucy Fairfax's dressing table, but the great man has not spoken. He hangs about her while she plays, sits almost at her feet while she makes the crewel antimacassars, but he does not speak the word that will decide her.

The fact is that his grace is constitutionally cautious. He has steered clear of innumerable belles of many seasons and their more dangerous mammas, and he is still reluctant to give up his liberty. But the lithe, graceful little figure and the expressive face, the soft, sympathetic manner have fascinated him, and every day, as his valet adjusts the marvelous wig and ties the scarlet scarf, his grace makes up his mind to declare his passion and win his bride.

It is time that there should be a mistress of Gretnam, not to mention the other ducal places, and the duke has decided in his own mind that Lucy Fairfax should be that mistress or no other; but still he cannot bring himself to the point, and Lucy Fairfax, apparently as innocent and unsuspecting as a school-girl, waits in vain.

So the seventh and last day comes, and Hugh, having taken his plain soldier's lunch of a mutton-chop and a glass of claret at his chambers, goes round to Park Lane to know his fate.

He goes, not with the quick step and excited bearing of an eager lover, but with the grave air of a soldier bent on camp business, and he finds himself pausing in front of a picture-shop to look at the pictures, and half guiltily reproaches himself for coldness.

Not thus did he seek Dulcie's answer; then all the gravity of his nature was melted and turned to fire.

"Poor Lucy!" he murmurs, as he turns away from the street and goes toward Park Lane. "I am offering her only half a heart, while she—yes, I know she loves me! It is not fair! Not fair!"

The servant admits him with a respectfully familiar smile and a subdued—

"Good-morning, Sir Hugh."

Hugh goes into the drawing-room, and asks straight out for Miss Fairfax.

"Yes, Sir Hugh, Miss Fairfax is in; Misses Maud and Edie have gone out. I'll tell her, sir Hugh," and he takes Hugh's hat and cane.

There's a pause, then the door opens, and Lucy Fairfax comes in.

It may be his fancy, he thinks, but there is a strange pallor on her face, a strange, shifty light in her grayish-green eyes.

She comes in and shuts the door and stands looking at him.

He looks so tall and soldierly, so gravely handsome, that her heart, so much of it as she allows out of her possession, goes to him.

But even as she mentally acknowledges his good gifts, she thinks: "If the duke had only spoken!"

Then he takes her hand and stands looking at her in silence for a moment.

At last he says:

"Well, Lucy, I have come for my answer. I have waited a week, patiently, I hope, for I felt that it was due to you. But now—I have come to know whether it is to be 'yes' or 'no.'"

Something more or less than a woman would be needed to resist the deep musical voice.

She had meant to put him off for one more day if that were possible, but as she feels the grasp of his hand, and hears the musical voice, her heart, worldly, mercenary, selfish as it is, betrays her.

"Have you really been so patient, Hugh?" she says, and she looks up at him.

He colors slightly, for he is truth itself.

"Yes, I have been patient, Lucy," he says. "As I said, I think it was due to you. You have—have borne with me, you know."

"Yes, but that is all over," she says, with a sharp look of inquiry.

"It is all over," he says, "or I should not come to you. Lucy, I will say nothing of the old days. But I will say this, that if your answer should be 'yes,' I will strive to make you happy."

Her heart beats. If there had been no duke in the question, how proudly, how triumphantly she would have thrown herself into his arms. But the vision of the ducal coronet comes before her even at this moment.

"Why do you hesitate, dear Lucy?" he says. "Do you doubt my love for you or your love for me?"

"No," she says, at last, and there is no acting now. "I know that if I say 'yes' I can—can make you love me, even if you do not love me now. No."

"Then say 'yes,'" he says. And he puts his arm round her waist.

At this even her cold heart melts, the vision of the duke fades, and she leans towards him.

"Hugh, I say 'yes,'" she murmurs.

"My dear Lucy," he says, and he bends his head and kisses her.

But as he does so, some cruel, spiteful imp recalls suddenly that first, sweet, passionate kiss which Dulcie had given him under the elms in the wood, and his heart is smitten with a sudden pang.

Perhaps she is conscious of it, for she looks up suddenly.

"Hugh! you are not sorry; you wanted me to say 'yes.'"

"Most assuredly, dear Lucy," he says, honestly.

"Why did you start, then?" she says, her keen, gray eyes fixed on his.

"Did I?" he says, with his grave smile. "For no reason that can affect you, dear Lucy; you have made me happy."

"Have I?" she says, with a curious smile. "Are you sure? I do not care, Hugh. If I have not, I will—I will make you happy, Hugh. You shall have no cause for regret."

(To be Continued.)

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The Government's Duty is Plain.

An Open Letter to the National Government of Newfoundland!

The namby-pamby indifference of our "national" government and, shall we say, its Press—towards the vital issues now confronting us, cannot but be repugnant to the country at large. At their caucuses, the public functions, and "staggering-bob" recruiting appeals they are lashing those of our young men who are staying at home instead of being in France. And yet, the members of our so-called "national" government are but plucking the mote from their neighbour's eyes while carefully overlooking the beam in their own. The eligibles who refuse to join up are not the only **cowards** in this community! There are others! For, is it not cowardice and the craven yellow-streak which prevent each and every individual member of the government from going to their various constituencies and squarely putting before their "chosen" people the vital issues at stake and the ideals for which the whole civilized world is arrayed in mortal combat before the Prussian hordes. For the possibility of losing a few measly votes in a sometime future election they are **afraid** to speak what must be in their innermost soul, provided the red blood of the white man flows through their veins as in ours.

The more one studies it the more it becomes apparent that the "national" government with which this country has been so recently inflicted is the emanation of a brain (or brains) desiring to evade responsibility for the deeds of the past; and an attempt to muzzle the Electorate and its mouthpiece—the Press. The Heavens be thanked that we have one proprietor and one editor at least, who refuse to be gagged. Indeed it would be surprising if either one or the other would consent to such treatment, realising as we do the attitude of both towards the gigantic struggle for Right and Justice in which our Empire and its Allies are involved.

It is universally conceded that this "national" government is not holding its first line of trenches—it is not standing to its guns (despite the protestations of the evasive editor of the Herald to the contrary). It appoints a Minister of Militia, but his powers are not made apparent, and further, it is agreed that he is but the "goat" (readers must pardon the slang—it's so expressive) for the duties and responsibility which the members themselves appear to be so anxious to evade. In the Minister of Militia's appeal he both threatens and cajoles. Conscription is hinted at---but---"breathe not the word itself, Mister Minister, it might not sound pleasant to the ears of some of our constituents! This is the attitude of our misents!" This is the attitude of our misloud-mouthed patriots so long as it cannot affect the votes they control.

And now see the damage they have done! They have driven our eligible young men into the position that "Well, seeing that conscription is coming in another few months, it's just as well to wait till then, and we'll all go together." Let our "national patriots" search the by-ways and the highways for expressions of opinion, and they'll surely find my statement undeniable.

And yet, those brave lads of ours are perishing in France through lack of reinforcements—vainly calling for the help which is not forthcoming.

AND WHY? BECAUSE OUR NATIONAL GOVERNMENT IS AFRAID TO DO ITS DUTY AND ENFORCE CONSCRIPTION.

With the exception of the "Telegram" the press of this country has adopted the attitude that it is not willing to support the introduction of legislation that will do away with purely voluntary enlistment. In some parts of the country the district quotas have been supplied regularly and without difficulty. The real feeling that sways the whole community is recognition of the relative **injustice** of the operation of the voluntary system. As time goes on, its unequal incidence becomes glaring. Some families which show a fine example of patriotism have suffered grievously, while their selfish and unresponsive neighbours suffer not at all. The country has also realised that voluntary enlistment has been responsible for sending to the Front most of the best men of this Country,—both from the physical standpoint and still more from the point of practical patriotism. It is also understood that it is those whom the country **can least spare** who are taking the risks, whilst the ranks of those who are lacking in public spirit and national feeling are unthinned. In other words, the virile manhood with strong national sentiments and regard for duty is diminishing, while those elements of our population who are least desirable from the national standpoint are being relatively increased. Thus, if the necessary quotas for re-inforcements are not forthcoming by the end of the year (and the present apathy and indifference of our national government are not commendable) then let us have Conscription. Even if force has to be applied in a few instances to support it, this force will have behind it the will and determination of an overwhelming majority of the population—our "national" government to the contrary notwithstanding. **Your duty is plain, gentlemen!**

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