



The Sound of Wedding Bells

Won After Great Perseverance!

CHAPTER XII. "You mean me, of course," she says, with her frank smile; she will smile, too; Hugh shall not have all the smiling. "You see, I have not forgotten your aptitude at thinly-disguised compliments. Well, if you are good I won't drive you."

though she knows that the face of the one man she loves far above all others on earth is growing darker and heavier with anger and displeasure, and though her own heart is aching with the dull pain of jealousy and remorse.

For all her smiles and rippling laughter the dinner seems to drag wearily; she hates the sight of the small, dark-robed figure, hates the sound of her soft, oppressive voice; and it is with a sudden sense of relief that she rises with the rest and escapes, for it is an escape, from Sir Archie's ardent looks and eager speeches.

Hugh sits over his wine, grim and almost silent, while Sir Archie, his blue eyes sparkling, rattles on, all unconscious, beating time to the music of the piano in the drawing-room.

Hugh sits silent and grim, scarcely listening, bitterly turning over in his mind that broken promise, and at last he rises. He will make an opportunity and see her alone for a moment, if this butterfly at his side will render it possible, and beg her to let there be an end to concealment—to let him make their engagement known.

"If you won't have any more wine, let us join the ladies," he says. They go in, and he makes straight for the tall, graceful figure seated beside Edie. Lucy Fairfax is at the piano playing, Maude sitting beside her with solemn approval and admiration. Dulcie's eyes are fixed on the pale face, now in repose and plain enough.

He goes up to her. "Edie, go and get that book of hunting sketches; I want you to show them to Sir Archibald," he says, and then, almost before she is out of hearing, he bends over the dark head he loves so well.

"Dulcie," he murmurs. But she looks straight before her. "Well?" she drops from her lips. He tugs at his mustache, and frowns, but he will be patient. "Dulcie—will you manage to come into the hall or anywhere? I want to speak to you."

"Can't you say it here?" she retorts. He colors and frowns. "No," he says; "will you not come?" She does not reply, and before he can speak again, Sir Archie is upon them with the sketch-book in his hand.

"Here is something in your way, Miss Dorrmore," he says. "Hunting sketches, you know." "Really!" she exclaims, turning to him with a sigh of welcome. "But," glancing at the piano, "hadn't you better go and turn over Miss Fairfax's music. She cannot do it, you know!"

"That's more in Hugh's way," says Archie, boldly; "I should turn over in the wrong place, and spoil the whole thing!" "Oh, pray go!" she says, turning her head but not her eyes to Hugh, and with a heavy frown, he obeys and goes, leaving Sir Archie to seat himself as closely as he dare to Dulcie.

CHAPTER XIII. Hugh marches to the piano, and stands very much like a sentinel, his hand upon the music, and the green eyes look up with a grateful smile.

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that comes, be his feelings what they may, with welcome contrast to the icy rebuff he had just suffered from Dulcie. He does not know that she is sitting staring at the sketches, but without seeing them; hearing Sir Archie's pleasant, musical voice, without listening or understanding a word; her whole being filled with remorse, and longing to get Hugh to her side again.

He doesn't know this, but simply feels aggrieved and wronged at what he inwardly terms her heartlessness and insatiate love of admiration. He, too, is not listening, and presently the soft, smooth voice says: "I am playing a waltz, and not a funeral dirge, Sir Hugh, as your countenance would indicate."

"Oh, no," she says, lightly. "I don't think any one knows it, I am sure your people do not. I happened— with a little, soft purr—"to be watching you at the moment, and so I discovered it."

He nods. It is difficult to find anything to say; at last he says, in the awkward fashion of a man: "I hope that you will like her?" "She nods and smiles. "I am sure I shall. I shall love her if she will let me! Who could help loving such a bright and beautiful creature? Certainly not a man, and for all they say about women's envy, very few women. For my own part, I am always ready to admire a beautiful woman as I am a handsome man, and I am sure I shall love her if she will let me."

"Thank you," he says again; her generosity touches him and softens him. "As to that, she will only be too glad, poor Dulcie!" "Why do you say 'poor Dulcie'?" she asks, her green eyes watching his face, grave and piteously tender. He laughs.

"I didn't want them to be neglected," he says. "Of course," she assents. "You would rather have had nothing and been left quite free. I can understand that. But, after all, there is nothing to complain of," and she smiles significantly.

He is silent for a moment; then she goes on: "Sir Hugh, do you want me to be quite frank with you?" "You always were," he replied. "I don't know why you should begin to be otherwise now."

"I won't," she says. "Well, then, I have guessed your secret." He doesn't start, but he looks down at her soft, smiling face with a questioning glance. She nods just as a bird might do. "I guessed it the moment she came into the room to-night. We were all startled by her beauty—even those who knew her—how much more, then, it—but on your face was not surprise only, but—pride. Now, a man is never proud of a woman unless he loves her, Sir Hugh."

He doesn't speak; but he thinks and wonders. But for Dulcie and the will, she, Lucy Fairfax, would have been his chosen wife; and she knows it, he feels that she knows it; and yet she can talk of Dulcie with this pleasant smile and frank candor. After all, then, she did not care for him. He ought to feel pleased and gratified, but—well, men are men, and he doesn't, not completely.

"I saw it in a moment," she goes on, "and I was very glad. May I congratulate you?" "Thanks," he says. "You are very kind. I did not know"—tugging at his mustache, thoughtfully—"that my face spoke so plainly. As a matter of fact, we—Dulcie and I—had decided to keep it secret for a while. I suppose, however, that it is everybody's secret by this time."

"Oh, no," she says, lightly. "I don't think any one knows it, I am sure your people do not. I happened— with a little, soft purr—"to be watching you at the moment, and so I discovered it."

He nods. It is difficult to find anything to say; at last he says, in the awkward fashion of a man: "I hope that you will like her?" "She nods and smiles. "I am sure I shall. I shall love her if she will let me! Who could help loving such a bright and beautiful creature? Certainly not a man, and for all they say about women's envy, very few women. For my own part, I am always ready to admire a beautiful woman as I am a handsome man, and I am sure I shall love her if she will let me."

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"Well, you see, hers has been such a peculiar position, such an isolated life; she has known no woman except the old lady, her aunt, by whom she has been brought up, and who—who— has let her have her own way, perhaps a little too much; and he smiles again indulgently, as one would smile when speaking of the willfulness of a dearly loved child. (To be Continued.)

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