



The Sound of Wedding Bells

Won After Great Perseverance!

CHAPTER XXX.

"No," she says, and her face grows pale. "The die is cast. You do not know what I mean. Perhaps some day you may. But, Hugh, I am yours now entirely, and, Hugh, I say again that I will make you happy; happier even than—Dulcie Dorrmore could have done."

"Regret!" he says, with a smile. He does not start, but he looks at her with a sudden tightening of the lips.

The name, the dear, familiar name, stabs him to the heart.

He is silent for a moment, then he says gravely:

"I am not sure of that, Lucy; but why mention—her name?"

She smiles up at him.

"Because you are thinking of her. Don't deny it, Hugh; I can read your face only too plainly! Never mind! We will both forget her, will we not? Dear Hugh!" and she leans her head sleek and smooth as a serpent's, on his breast.

There is silence for a moment. For all his assurance that he will forget Dulcie, he is thinking of her now, thinking of her as she used to rest upon his breast, and look up at him with her dark eyes shining with mingled love and mischief. Oh, Heavens! even now he thinks of her! Shall he never forget her?

It is he who speaks first.

"This will be pleasant news for my mother and the girls," he says with a smile.

"Yes," she says; then she looks up at him. "But—but don't be precipitate, Hugh; let us have time to breathe."

"What do you mean?" he asks, gently.

She laughs softly.

"You men will never understand us," she says. "Don't you see that I want to tell them myself?"

"Oh, I see," he responds, smiling.

"Yes," and she smooths the flower in his coat, which her head has displaced. "That is half the pleasure we girls get out of an engagement, cackling—that's an old word of Sir Archibald's—he starts and shrinks—"cackling to one's female friends. Let me tell them to-night. May I?"

"Certainly, dear Lucy," he says, and with something like alacrity, for if there is anything Hugh dreads, it is a "family scene."

"And you will come to-night, after dinner," she says, "and receive the congratulations? No!" she says suddenly, "come to-morrow; that will leave us all this evening to talk about it."

"Very well," he assents, still glad-

ly, and with a sense of relief, "I will come to-morrow."

"And you will go now, Hugh, dear," she goes on. "If—if you stay they will guess something. You know," with an arch smile, "you were always bad at concealment! They will guess, and our little surprise will be spoiled."

"Very well," he assents again. "I'll come to-morrow. What a little plotter you are."

"Stupid boy!" she murmurs, sinking out of his arms. "Don't you see I am doing it all on your behalf? You hate family conclaves and congratulations, and by to-morrow their surprise and excitement will have worked itself out."

He stares at her.

"You are a clever girl," he says. "Well, have it your own way. Good-bye, Lucy, dear," and he takes her in his arms and kisses her.

For the first time in her life she surrenders herself, and lies in his arms, then she starts suddenly.

"There is a ring at the bell, Hugh!" she says. "Go now, dear!" and she rises on tiptoe and kisses him.

Then, as he goes out, she leans against the table, and puts her hand to her heart.

"I was wrong—wrong to play fast and loose with him," she murmurs. "For I love him. Yes, I love him! And he has not forgotten her yet! But he shall—he shall!"

"The Duke of Gretnam, miss," says the footman.

In a moment she recovers herself, and turns to meet the great man.

In a moment her eye takes in the fact that he is dressed this morning with more than usual care. He is tightly laced up in his long frock coat, the marvelous wig has been newly curled, and the grizzled whiskers recently dyed.

Even as she goes to meet him, she notices that there is a certain nervous pre-occupation unusual with him.

"How do you do?" he says, taking the small white hand. Then he sinks into the chair she wheels forward for him, and looks nervously.

"Quite alone, I see," he says. "Indeed I knew you would be, for I have just left Misses Maud and Edie at the stores."

She smiles down at him.

"I have just met Hugh," he says, wiping his forehead carefully, so as not to disarrange the wig.

She smiles.

"Yes. Sir Hugh came to see his mother."

He nods, and smooths the one glove he carries carefully. The great Duke of Gretnam, the owner of a princely rent roll, is utterly overcome by the small, red-haired, green-eyed girl, who fascinates him.

"Fine fellow, Hugh," he says.

"Yes," she replies; "a very fine fellow—as you say."

He is silent again, staring at the pattern in the carpet.

"Have you been riding this morning?" she asks.

"No," he says, looking up at her fondly, "no, I didn't care to. Why don't you ride now? You used to."

For the life of her, such is her nature, she cannot refrain from trifling with him, though she has just plighted her troth to Hugh.

"I—I cannot ride often. Lady Falconer wants me a great deal," she says, softly.

He fidgets on his chair.

"But—but," he says, stammeringly, "you are not Lady Falconer's companion?"

"I am really," she says, with a little sigh. "She has been very good to me, your grace."

"Very good to you," he repeats, in

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an injured tone. "That—that's nonsense, you know; other people can be good to you."

"I don't quite understand," she says, leading him on with a soft smile.

After all, if he is about to propose, it will be a good joke. It will be a fine thing to refuse the great Duke of Gretnam.

"I mean," he says—then he stops and looks at her—"I mean, you ought not to waste all your time on Lady Falconer or lady any one else," he goes on. "In short, Miss Fairfax—Lucy, you are too good for that!"

"Oh, no," she murmurs; "I am a mere nobody!"

"Don't say that," he says, quickly.

"You might be—Miss Fairfax—Lucy—I came here this morning to say what I have had on my lips to say for weeks, months."

He pauses and settles his scarf, and she looks at him with bated breath.

Is he going to speak the word now that it is too late?

"Miss Fairfax—Lucy—you will be surprised to hear that I have watched you for some time"—he pauses and settles his collar nervously—"that I have watched you for some time as a man does who intends to make a young lady an offer—an offer of his hand and heart."

She does not start, but she looks at him, and then down at the heartstring.

"Miss Fairfax, if you believe me," he blunders on, "I have long thought of you as the lady who would do honor to the—the—rank and position that I hold. I am a plain man, Miss Fairfax."

She looks at him, and as she recalls the stalwart form of Hugh, she cannot even mentally contradict him.

"And I cannot wrap my offer in words of eloquence, but I do offer you in simple phrase my heart and hand!" and he rises and extends his ducal hand.

She looks at him with bated breath. It has come at last. Here at her feet lies a ducal coronet; the long rent-roll of Gretnam, the magnificent family diamonds—above all, the title of "your grace."

The room seems to reel before her. All hers, and she has lost them by a quarter of an hour—by five minutes. The duke moistens his lips, and fidgets with his glove.

"Some might say," he says, "that here is a disparity between our ages, but—but I have noticed that men of my—I will say—mature age, do not make bad husbands. We have, if you will permit me to remark, sown our wild oats, and have taken a rational view of life. I do not know whether that will influence you, but I assure you, my dear Miss Fairfax, that I have never seen another woman that I could love. Miss Fairfax, in offering you my heart, I use no merely stereotyped phrase. I come to you with a heart, notwithstanding my age, unswayed by the world. What have you to say to me?" and the ducal tone makes itself distinct in the question.

What can she say to him? She has, a quarter of an hour ago, plighted her troth to another, a simple baronet, and here is a duke imploring her to be his wife!

She cannot speak—mortification,

annoyance stifles her. Before the prospect which his words have opened out to her, her "love" for Hugh grows fainter and fainter. If there was only some way of escape!—if she could but recall that unwise assent of hers!

"Well?" he says, and his face grows rather pale under the suspense, but he says the "well" gently and with knightly patience as a duke should.

Still she cannot speak; the busy, acute brain is hard at work. If there were only some scheme by which she could release herself from the ill-advised, imprudent betrothal to Hugh.

A ducal coronet at her feet, and she has bound her hands! Was ever an unfortunate girl placed in such a maddening position? Her chagrin is so great, her self-pity so deep, that actually she does for herself what she would never do for another—she sheds a tear.

It rolls down the pale cheek and drops on her hands, clasped with maiden modesty—and astute perplexity—before her, and the duke sees it.

Like most men, he has the wildest horror of tears, and he begins to blink and fumble for his eyeglass, nervously.

"Don't distress yourself, my dear young lady!" he says. "I beg you will not—not—agitate yourself. I should never forgive myself if I were the cause, however unintentionally, of ringing tears to those eyes."

She lifts those eyes to his face and sighs deeply. The words, "It is too late!" trembles on her lips, then a sudden thought flashes across her brain, and a gleam—light, treacherous as the bar of gold across a tiger's eyes—comes for a moment into the green orbs. A desperate idea has leapt her; but desperate cases warrant desperate measures.

"Your grace," she says; then she pauses, really trembling.

"Well," he says, encouragingly, "you intend to refuse me and fear to say so? Is that it? If it is I am very sorry!" He smiles rather ruefully.

"They say that old—that men of mature age can bear disappointment better than young ones, but I do not feel as if that were the case now. Well, all me my fate, young lady," and he puts his hand gently on her shoulder.

As if the caress—for it is a caress—had given her courage, she says in a low, hurried voice:

"Duke, your kindness tempts me to open my heart to you, and yet—"

"Do so," he rejoins; "do so, I beg of you. Why should you hesitate? Confide in me, but tell the plain, unvarnished truth."

"Even at the risk of losing your good opinion? Even at the risk of your misunderstanding me, your grace?"

He inclines his head emphatically.

"Even at that risk. But my opinion of you is too deeply rooted to be easily shaken, and I do not think I shall misunderstand you. Come!"

(To be Continued.)

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War News

Messages Received Previous to 9 A.M.

ITALIAN VICTORY.

Italian Headquarters in N. Italy, Sunday, Nov. 18.—The Austrians who forced their way across Piave River above Zenson have thrown into the river, drowned, or netted, killed or captured until not an enemy remains on the bank at that most threatened point. The fight was one of the most chapters of the war and one of the most glorious. Details of the fight have been gathered from eyewitnesses who saw the fearful carnage Friday night and yesterday afternoon until the whole west bank cleared except for the corpses of shore, and in the foreground wounded were so numerous that they have not yet received succour. The enemy had staked everything on trying to the west bank of the river. The Italians staked everything keeping him on the eastern bank. The Austrians made their first move of day in two separate crossings at a distance above Zenson, the first village of Fagare, and then at a mill called Sega Mill, near F. Several circumstances enabled them to pass. They chose a place where a sand bar ran in mid-stream, then a landing and guiding the streams into two small shallow rents; also there was a heavy screening of their movements. They carried material for an imp bridge, with uprights and iron for floorings. This was about 10 o'clock in the morning and the mist at that early hour hid the across the second narrow channel the west bank. The last ten feet men waded across in water to their waists. In their first rush they went past Italian machine batteries, stirring their and driving it. The Italians back the village of Fagare. Here the fight began as the Austrians recovered from the surprise and fought like demons. It was a to-and-fro fight through the street town with no place for arm or machine guns and the Italian bayonets, hand grenades, and gelatine torpedoes. The Austrians held part of the town near bank with the Italians on the side. The Austrians tried to send a line around the town and succeed in part on one side until the batteries to the north got ram the line outside the shelter of streets. This line was the first demolished and then the Italian this side of the town advanced and heaving their way. The mist held at first, then began to cover, and finally broke as the

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