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Love a Conqueror

WEDDED AT LAST!

CHAPTER V.

And Shirley herself would have eaten dry bread with a sunny countenance and laughing, happy hazel eyes if that dry bread could have been eaten in the society of one person who loved her. She would have worn the shabbiest of garments if loving eyes had told her that the dingy setting did not matter, that the pictures was as pleasant in its tarnished frame as it could have been in one gorgeous with gliding and carving. She was a contented little mortal naturally; she was not conceited, or ambitious, or anxious to outdress or outvie her neighbors, and a very little sunshine would have sufficed her—but even that little seemed to be denied her.

They were not actively unkind to her at Fairholme Court; no one, except perhaps Alice Fairholme, disliked the beautiful girl who was so gentle, quiet and unobtrusive, and never in the way; but they did not care for her, and in that lay the sting. No one cared whether she was glad or sorry, well or ill, rested or tired, no one ever sympathized, no one heeded, she was so lonely in the great cheerful, bustling household; she was neither useful nor ornamental, as Alice had told her one day. It would make very little difference to any one's comfort and happiness if she were to fade away and die. No one would care much but Jack.

And even Jack would not miss her very much. Shirley thought pitifully, if she were to die. He had many friends and companions in London now; and, though, when he came to Scotland for the short annual visit which was all Sir Gilbert would allow, he was kind and tender as of old, and Shirley felt that she was no longer necessary to him, as she had been in the past. Jack was a man now, a tall handsome fellow with a smart little mustache, and particular as to the cut of his coat. What foolish nonsense people talked when they said women were older than men for their years! Jack was only a year or two Shirley's senior, but he had left her far behind, and while he was a man, she was a child.

Nobody at Fairholme Court wanted her—that was evident. Her uncle treated her with careless kindness.

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her aunt gave her a smooth fair cheek to kiss night and morning, and occasionally reproved her for some trifling fault of deportment or manner. Alice snubbed her perpetually, and the children were fond of her in their fashion, or rather selfish, cruel fashion, for they tyrannized over her unmercifully. Her cousin Oswald was kind to her when he was at home, which was but rarely, for he did not care to ask for much leave. Even Miss Martin, the children's governess, was cold and distant while the servants neglected or patronized her—and the patronage was infinitely harder to bear than the neglect.

Altogether Shirley Ross felt herself a very lonely, sorrowful little wail upon the wide, wide world, and all ready, at the very outset of her voyage, she was tired and worn and longing for its end.

When Shirley came first into her new home, fresh from her mother's funeral, she was far too miserable to heed any of her surroundings. All her faculties seemed to be dulled by the terrible grief which had fallen upon her. She could think of nothing but the sorrowful journey and its end of the dear gentle mother who had always been so kind and gentle to her. But youth is very elastic, and soon recovers even from the bitterest grief; and, as the first numbness of despair wore off, she began to feel the want of some sympathy, some affection from those around her; but she found her timid advances ignored or repulsed, and she was thrown back upon herself, chilled and dispirited, and during the two long years she had lived at Fairholme Court she had lived as solitary a life as it was possible to lead.

Fairholme Court was a stately and commodious mansion built in the end of the last century, but fitted up with every modern convenience. It possessed no haunted passages, no secret chambers. All was bright, cheerful and modern within; the small windows had been removed and wide panes of plate-glass substituted; the rooms were spacious and well ventilated, the drawing rooms extremely handsome. To Shirley the house was neither so beautiful nor so interesting as an humbler but more antique and less pretentious abode would have been; but the grounds were lovely, and the view from the upper windows was so beautiful that it often made Shirley forget her troubles.

The schoolroom, the only sitting-room really free to the little dependant, and that only out of lesson hours, was a lofty square room, lighted by two long windows which opened on to a lawn; round this side of the house there was a veranda, and Mand and eJan Fairholme were fond of taking their lessons out there on the hot summer days. Within, the room gave most unmistakable signs of the use to which it was put. There were a long-enduring Broadwood piano, a most uncompromising-looking sofa in one corner, and a reclining-board in another; the carpet showed signs of hard service, and there was many an ink-splash on the red cloth table-cover. Two recesses were filled with

book-shelves, and on the walls were hung some simply-framed water-color pictures. Oswald and Alice's procreations, and some few of Shirley's own. It was neither a picturesque nor a pretty room, nor a fitting background for the little figure sitting alone in the fading firelight in an attitude of an unconscious grace, and so still, that it was quite possible for any one to enter the room without becoming aware of her presence.

Presently the door was pushed open noisily, and a young man entered, a slight dark man, with a black mustache and something of Shirley's own regularity of feature. He was handsome and graceful and rather foreign-looking, and Shirley's affection for her cousin Oswald had partly originated in the fact that there was much resemblance between him and her dead mother.

"Shirley," he exclaimed, "are you here? Why, it is a blind man's holiday here, and no mistake!"

"Is that you Oswald?" Shirley said, turning around from the fire and speaking in such a pretty pathetic, thrilling voice. "Do you want me?"

"Want you? Of course, I want you!" he replied, as he advanced toward the fire. "What do you mean by moping here in the dark when there are two delightful eligible young men having afternoon tea with Alice and her ladyship in the oak parlor?"

Shirley laughed lightly, turning her face toward him as he threw himself into the low chair by the fire, which was Miss Martin's favorite seat, and sending forward, looked at her by the light of the fire.

"They don't want me, and I don't want them," she said carelessly. "Who are the delightful eligible young men, Oswald?"

"Not to know them argues yourself, unknown, little coz," he replied lightly. "I am sure their names have been household words here for the last twenty-four hours. At first it was, 'Will they come, or won't they come?' Then it was, 'Oh, here they are!'—'No, it isn't!—Yes, it is! I am sure I should think Alice has lost considerably in weight since the morning, she has undergone such an agony of expectation.'"

"I wish Alice could hear you," Shirley remarked, lightly.

"I am glad she can't. What an awful wiggling I should get! But, little woman, look here; there are two young men. I tell you, and you are welcome to one—not to 'the one, you now, but to the other; so I have come to fetch you.'"

"Haden't you better tell me which is the one and which is the other?" said the girl merrily—"or I may be inclined to appropriate what was not intended for me."

"You would soon be enlightened," Oswald Fairholme said laughingly. "If you were in the oak parlor for five minutes, you would have no need to ask that question. To the one are all sweetness and smiles and em-er-ement, to the other we are mere-

civil and gracious. Shirley, when are you going to fall down and worship the golden calf?"

"Whenever I get the chance," she replied, with sudden earnestness.

"Do you mean to say that you Shirley Ross, would marry for money?" said her cousin, lifting up his

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hands with affected horror.

"I do, most certainly."

"You mercenary little wretch!" he said, laughing. "I thought you were above such a thing. But you're just like the rest of the sex. I shall never find a woman to marry me because I am the best-looking fellow in her Majesty's—the Hussars, but because I am heir to Fairholme Court and Sir Gilbert's only son. So says the world."

"Poor Oswald! What a misfortune it must be to an only son and heir!" Shirley said, laughing. "But you have not yet told me who these eligibles are."

"One, my dear and curious cousin, true daughter of mother Eve, and 'the one,' is Sir Hugh Glynn, the new owner of Maxwell, who has come to Scotland to see about the alteration and restoration of his mansion; the other is his friend Major Stuart, of the Royal Buffs, at your service."

"Hugh Glynn—what a pretty name!" said Shirley, dreamily.

"And an awfully good looking man—as handsome for a man as you for a girl, Shirley—and you are unusually lovely, you know. Stuart is a sabreur of the Guy Livingstone style. Just the fellow to fetch a romantic lassie like yourself."

"Am I tidy?" Shirley asked, as she rose slowly and stood upright, turning to her cousin to be inspected; and Oswald Fairholme, as he looked up at her, thought in his heart that no livelier vision than his cousin Shirley had poet ever dreamed of or artist painted.

She was a slim, slight girl, whose every movement was rarely graceful, who walked as few Englishwomen ever walk, who carried herself with an unconscious grace which, even had she been less beautiful, would have made her remarkable anywhere. When her cousin spoke of her as unusually lovely, he did her no more than justice. She was pale, with the beautiful marble-like pallor which is so far removed from the sallowness of ill-health as light from darkness; her hair, curling over her brow and gathered into a soft way knot on the top of her neck, was of a fair chestnut brown, golden where the sun lashed it; her eyes were of the purest, darkest hazel, shaded by long eyelashes which, like her straight clear eyebrows were many shades darker than her hair, being almost black; and the sweet mouth with its pouting tender crimson lips was as perfect a mouth as lover ever kissed.

She was dressed in a black, closely-fitting serge dress, with a plain linen collar round her throat and a bunch of mountain-ash berries at her breast.

(To be Continued.)

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9770. — A VERY ATTRACTIVE ROBE.



Ladies' Kimono.
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