

# Love a Conqueror

## OR WEDDED AT LAST

### CHAPTER XXII.

"My brave Shirley!" Ruby responded tenderly, and for fully half an hour the girls sat in the firelit hall, Ruby's eyes watching anxiously and sorrowfully the still face turned toward the window, with such terrible pallor and anguish upon it.

Presently a carriage dashed up to the door; but it was only Lady Fairholme and Lady Capel returning from a drive. As they entered the hall, stately in their velvet and furs, with a footman in attendance, Shirley and Ruby rose, and went a step or two forward. Lady Capel saw them, and took Shirley's hand and kissed her; but the words she would have spoken died away upon her lips as she saw the alteration in the girl's face, and she went on with a mist in her kind eyes. Lady Fairholme had stood still and glanced at them; but she had passed on immediately, without a word or second look at her husband's niece, and her voice was perfectly unmoved the next minute when she asked why the hall was not yet lighted.

Without a word, Shirley went back to the window; her misery was too great for her aunt's cruelty to touch her; but Ruby's face flushed angrily, and she bit her red lip to suppress the passionate words which in her indignation she was about to utter.

The hall was lighted now, the full glare of gas replacing the ruddy firelight; and the footman had replenished the fire, which blazed up cheerily. Presently Alice came out of the oak parlor and crossed the hall on her way up-stairs, her soft pink cashmere draperies sweeping the polished floor as she went her way affectedly and languidly; and still Ruby and Shirley kept their vigil at the window watching for the dog-cart which was to bring Oswald and Guy from the station.

"Ruby, you will be cold; go to the fire, dear," Shirley said softly once; but Ruby did not move.

At last two bright lights came flashing into view in the darkness without, and the sound of rapidly approaching wheels grew clearer and clearer. Shirley rose then, still and calm; but Ruby was trembling so violently that she could hardly stand. Shirley put her arms round her.

"I am afraid all this is too much for you," she said tenderly. "Ruby, how shall I bear it if I have made you ill too?"

"I am not ill—I am only nervous. Oh, Shirley!" she added, as the hall

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The Club That Knocked Half the Rub Out of SCRUB



door was hastily opened from without, and Captain Fairholme, looking agitated and weary, entered, pausing for a moment and shading his eyes as if the sudden transition from darkness to light dazzled him; then he shut the door behind him, and the girls heard the dog-cart being taken back to the stables.

"Oswald," Shirley said, as she went a few steps towards him, while Ruby, quite overcome by her agitation, sank down upon the nearest chair and hid her face in her hands "how cold and tired you look! Come and warm yourself and rest."

Oswald had started violently as he heard the calm voice fell upon his ear when he came to her side, with one swift glance at Ruby's drooping figure, and took both her little hands in his. Burning with fever as he had been so short a time previously, they were icy cold now, so cold that the young man could not repress an exclamation.

"How cold you are!" he ejaculated, and for a moment they stood looking at each other in silence, the young officer's eyes full of unspeakable pity and compassion, the girl's heavy with hopeless misery and woe.

"I have no good news for you dear," he said slowly.

"I did not expect any, Oswald," was the answer, uttered so brokenly, so pitifully, so despairingly, that the tears rose in Captain Fairholme's eyes. "Thank you for all your goodness to—us. Come and help me to console Ruby," she added.

Captain Fairholme went over to the fire, his eyes dim, and his lips quivering under his dark mustache. Shirley went to Ruby and raised the drooping form and rested the girl's head upon her breast.

"Ruby," she said softly, "try to be brave, dear. You will distress Oswald, and he is very weary."

She drew her gently over to the fire; and for a few moments they stood there together, Ruby's head on Shirley's breast and her hand in Oswald's, who was hardly less moved. Shirley was the only one who retained any semblance of composure, but she was calm with the calm of despair.

"They give us no hope," Captain Fairholme said then huskily. "They think that any court would ratify the marriage. Even if you could give a good reason for going to Dumfries with Sir Hugh, it would avail nothing."

"I knew it would be so," said Shirley wearily. "Hush, dear Ruby, don't sob so! And—Guy—how does he bear it, Oswald?"

The frozen calm of her face was

breaking now, and her breath came fast.

"Badly, I fear," Oswald said sadly. "It is early days as yet, Shirley."

"Yes."

There was a pause.

"Where is he, Oswald?"

"He left me at the cross-roads," Oswald said. "He wanted a walk, he said. Why, Shirley—good Heaven, what is the matter? What are you going to do?"

For Shirley had rushed away down the hall, and was trying with her little hands, so frail and trembling, to unfasten the heavy bolts of the hall door.

"At the cross-roads!" she repeated lifting her great restless eyes to her cousin's face, with a wild terror in their depths. "Don't you perceive where he was going? Oh, be quick—for pity's sake, be quick!"

"But, Shirley—"

"Oswald, don't you see?" she cried wildly. "At the cross-roads! He was going to Maxwell—and they must not—oh, Heaven, they must not meet now."

### CHAPTER XXIII.

Alone in the library of his splendid home, Sir Hugh Glynn was thinking of the evil deed he had wrought. He was lying back in a deep luxurious arm-chair. His uncle, from whom he had inherited Maxwell, had been a bibliomaniac, and he had not spared his wealth, which had been great, to gratify his mania.

Many a volume which would have delighted a connoisseur, but which possessed little interest for the uninitiated, lined the shelves which surrounded the room on all sides, broken into one by the carved doorway which faced the magnificent black marble mantel on the other. Even between the two great stained-glass windows the volume had taken refuge; there was not an available space anywhere which had not been utilized, and the room contained a magnificent collection of books as any in the kingdom.

But the present owner of the collection cared but little for it at any time. Had he wanted money, it would not have cost him a pang to sacrifice the books over whom his uncle had spent so much time and trouble and so much gold. But now he never saved them a thought. There was a heavy frown upon his brow, partly of displeasure and partly of pain; for his injured arm troubled him still and the fever of his mind had not tended to lessen his bodily discomfort.

He was alone at Maxwell; but he had no present intention of remaining here. As soon as his troublesome business was settled, he would take his wife to the south of France to introduce her to his mother, and they would travel for a time. He had no doubt as to the result of Major Stuart's application to the lawyers. Even if the matter were brought before the law-courts, the decision must be in his favor. Shirley could not account for her visit to Dumfries with him; for, even if it would have saved her, she would not betray her brother's trust and ruin his reputation and his prospects. She was his wife, Sir Hugh knew, married to him by the abominable law in force in the country in which poor Shirley had passed three dreary years, which had culminated in this crowning misery—married to him by treachery and baseness and falsehood truly, but his nevertheless. Yet even while Hugh Glynn's eyes brightened as he thought of her beauty and grace and sweetness, the frown on his white forehead deepened as he puffed slowly at his

cigar and remembered the look of horror, of loathing, of contempt, which had been on his wife's face

when he saw it last.

"If she had loved me only a little!" he said, half aloud, with a sudden yearning in the blue eyes which chased away all their sleepiness and their coldness. "If she had given me a little of the love she lavished upon him—hang him!" And the blue eyes darkened with savage jealousy and anger. How easily Guy had won that for which he would have given his life!

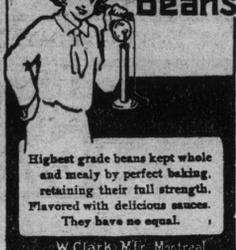
Why, even for the possession of her, to call her his own, to look upon her loveliness, and know that she was his wife, he had given his honor! What would he not have given to see her eyes rest upon him as they rested upon Guy, to have her lips meet his in requited love, to feel her hand steal into his and linger there? His wealth, his life! For he loved her.

He loved her. That was his one excuse for the treachery he had committed, and which, even in his own eyes, seemed hideously vile. He loved her madly, wildly, with all the passion of his nature; and instead of letting this love lift him to a higher life, he had yielded to the subtle temptation with which he had been tempted, and let it sink him to the level of a traitor.

She was Guy's betrothed, Guy's one eye-lamb in all the world, for he had neither riches, nor title, nor position, nor beauty to win a woman's fancy and subdue her heart; and Guy was his friend, his tried and trusty friend, to whose courage he owed the life he enjoyed. His friend—and yet he had betrayed him! Guy had saved his life, and he had taken from him what was far dearer to him than life. When that fatal love that had entered both hearts at sight of Shirley Ross's fair face had come between them, all the old friendship and gratitude had died out of Hugh Glynn's heart, killed by the savage jealousy and passion. Many a time he had felt that he could have killed Guy Stuart when he had seen him with Shirley, and the very repression he had been forced to exercise had doubled his passionate resentment. And then Latrelle had told him the story of poor Marian Ross's betrayal which had suggested the idea of her daughter's; and temptation had come into his way through Guy's faith in him and Shirley's, and thus he had requited their trust, thus he had betrayed it, thus he had fallen.

(To be Continued.)

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when he saw it last.

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He rose from his seat and moved up and down the stately room restlessly. He almost wished that he had spared her; and yet to leave her to Guy—to let her be his wife—no, it was impossible! But that heart-broken scornful face, that walling despairing cry which rang in his ears even now! Ah, how she loved Guy!

Amid all his jealousy and remorse and triumph, the bitterest thought in Sir Hugh Glynn's mind was that in his place Guy Stuart would have acted very differently. If Shirley had loved him—Hugh—Guy would never have lifted his finger, if by so doing he could have won her love; he would have buried it in his own heart and gone away without one word to trouble her peace or to pain the friend who had been more fortunate than he. Sir Hugh felt instinctively that that would have been Guy's course in his place, and the thought of that superiority in the man who had been his friend rankled cruelly.

(To be Continued.)

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