

The Sound of Wedding Bells

— OR — Won After Great Perseverance!

CHAPTER XVII.
"But I must, I could not bear that there should be any concealment between us; I could not bear that you should find out for yourself, perhaps months, years hence, that—that you were not the first whom I have—promised to love."

The word almost dies on her lips, but he watches it, and his face goes pale for a moment, not at the first announcement, but at the recollection of that first love of hers.

"Well, Dulcie!" he says.

She pauses a moment, it is so hard to tell him, and yet he must be told.

"Archie," she says, "if I were to tell you that I did love—some one else, and loved him very dearly, that I am not sure, not quite sure, that I have even now forgotten him, what would you say?"

He takes her clasped hands in both his, and kisses them gently, then he looks up at her, all his heart in his eyes.

"I should say, Dulcie, that the man who was so lucky as to win your love—and lose it, did not deserve the gift the gods have given him, that he—be he who he may—was not worthy of your love."

She sighs gently, then she looks away.

"That is as regards him, and—now for me?"

"As regards yourself, darling," he says, "I say that you are not the girl to think long of a man who had let you go, even in the face of all sorts of obstacles, and that I am content to wait until you have forgotten him. Content! nay, more than content, for see, darling, am I not the gainer by his folly?"

The tears came into Dulcie's eyes at the tender response.

How delicately he had assumed that the blame was on Hugh's side and none on hers.

"You are very good to me," she says, with a tearful smile.

"Am I?" and he laughs softly. "Well, don't tell me any more, darling; perhaps, and he looks away from her, "perhaps I know or can guess what it was."

She starts slightly.

"You know?"

"I know or can guess," he says, in a low voice, "and I don't want to know any more, darling! Let the past bury its past; you and I have nothing to do with it. All I want is your love, if not in the present, in the future! Give me that, Dulcie, only give me that, and I shall be content, content! The happiest man alive!"

And he holds out his arms.

She looks at him for a moment in silent wonder at his great love; then she lays her head upon his shoulder, and with a little sob in her voice, murmurs:

"Archie! the woman who couldn't love you must—must be made of stone!"

"And if you were made of stone," he murmurs back, "my love should warm you into life, like that statue of Galatea, which grew into a woman under the sculptor's love! No, darling, I am not fearful of the future. Trust to me, and I will win your love, ay, in spite even of the past!"

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Then the door opens, and Lady Brookley, coughing warningly, enters. Dulcie has barely time to struggle out of Archie's long arms before the old lady is in the room.

As for him he does not attempt to rise, but looks up with an impudent smile, as the old lady declares afterward.

"Well, I'm sure!" she says, with much indignation; while her kindly old eyes are twinkling with tearful satisfaction. "This is very pretty! How dare you be so familiar with my companion, Sir Archibald Hope? On your knees, and in my drawing-room, too."

And she stoops and kisses Dulcie, who bends her head for a moment against her bosom.

"Aunt, I'm the happiest man in England!" says Archie, searching for Dulcie's hand, and after some difficulty obtaining it.

"You are the most impudent, I know!" retorts the old lady, her eyes sparkling, her face all dimples.

"She has promised to be my wife!" said Archie, trying to speak calmly, his eyes devouring Dulcie's downcast face.

"Oh! And by 'she' I suppose you mean my companion, Miss Dorriemore?" says Lady Brookley.

"Well, let me tell you, sir, that while the young lady is under my roof, she is, so to speak, under my protection, and that I shall consider whether I shall give my consent or not."

Archie laughs defiantly, and stands upon the hearth-rug, his hands behind his back, his handsome face full of almost boyish happiness.

"And there's Lord Edward, too," goes on the old lady, her hand carressing Dulcie's neck. "We've got to ask him, sir, you impudent, audacious boy, do you suppose you are going to ride rough shod over us all? What do you think, Edward?" she goes on, turning to the earl, who comes in puffing and blowing. "Here is a pretty state of things. This boy, if you please, has been abusing our hospitality and persuading this poor, innocent girl that he's in love with her! As if such a thing were possible! I call upon you to assert your authority and put a stop to it!"

"Eh! What?" roars the earl, as if he were shouting from the quarter-deck, and staring at the downcast Dulcie and the triumphant figure on the hearth-rug. "What?" and he breaks into a fit of laughter, and comes and pats Dulcie on the back as if she were a child and needed encouragement. "Is that what's in the wind, eh? Well, you're a sly dog, Master Archie! What, come into a man's house and steal the best thing he's got! But, begad"—with a snort and a shake of the head—"I can't blame you—it's just what I'd have done myself. There's only one thing though, by Jupiter! You aren't half good enough for her!" and he pats Dulcie on the back again.

Archie laughs and looks at Dulcie. "Didn't I tell you that was what he would say? But it's quite true, sir! There isn't a man born who's half good enough for her. But we have your good wishes, uncle?"

"You have, my boy, you have!" roars the old man. "By Jove, but you're a lucky young dog! You don't deserve it. You're only a hanger-on about town, a club lounge like the rest of 'em! She deserved something better than that. By Jupiter! a girl like Dulcie ought—ought—with a burst and a solemn shake of the head—"ought to have married a sailor."

There is a general peal of laughter, in which Dulcie's silvery strain chimes in, and in the midst of it she gets up, and followed by Lady Brookley, runs out of the room.

Then Archie explains as much as he thinks needful, and the old earl is soon in a state of excitement and enthusiasm.

"A wonderful girl, my boy," he said, rubbing his hands together, and rolling his eyes—"a perfectly wonderful girl. I give you my word, my dear boy, a room doesn't seem furnished if she isn't in it. She's the only girl I know who can talk without being tiresome, and laugh without making you think of cats! My boy, you are a lucky fellow! And you were sweet on her ever so long, eh? And didn't know she was here? Now, that's what I call Providence, Archie; Providence, my boy! Lor', to think of it! That

other fellow might have snapped her up, right from under your nose! Of course you'll have the wedding here, my boy? And look here, by Jupiter! I'll give her away. I don't believe the poor girl has a relative in the world. George, your aunt and I feel like a mother and father to her, and I'll give her away."

Archie shakes the old man's hand gratefully.

"That's just like you, uncle," he says; "but as to a wedding, I am afraid," and he moans; "I dare not say a word to Dulcie about it, just yet. She—she, you see—she might take fright."

"Oh, nonsense!" retorts the earl, sticking his thumbs in his waistcoat pocket. "When a ship's launched, the sooner she sails the better. Take my advice, my boy, and get her to name the happy day. By Jupiter! that's what I did with your aunt; besides, my boy, we're rather anxious, you know. I'm not a young man, and I should like to see a youngster to inherit the title. Think it over, Archie, and tell her you can't and won't wait. Nothing like being firm—with a woman. That's what I was with your aunt, my boy," and with a bright and jolly laugh, the earl rings the bell for the evening toddy.

"We'll drink her health, Archie," he says, smacking Archie on the back. "Gad, my boy, we'll have a bowl of punch."

All this is very well, and better still when Dulcie and Lady Brookley come in again, and Archie is allowed to sit on a low chair beside her, while the earl recounts his love adventures, which appear to have been numerous, but which, happily for him, resulted in Lady Brookley as the climax.

It is still better when, the old couple having retired to rest, Archie gets a few minutes with Dulcie as he lights her candle.

"You are not sorry, Dulcie?" he asks, with a smile, anxious and eager.

"You are not regretting what you have done?"

She looks up at him with an answering smile that has no touch of regret in it.

"No," she replies, in a low voice. "I am not sorry—I do not regret. The only thing I regret is that—that you should have cared for me so long, and that I—"

She stops, but he finishes the sentence for her.

"That you should have been so hard-hearted as to have thought me only half serious. Is that it? Think no more of that, my darling. I would have willingly waited for years to have won you at last. And I have won you, Dulcie, have I not?"

And she lifts her eyes to his.

"Yes," she says—"yes."

And he bends and kisses her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

As Lady Falconer still goes about the house in Park Lane with her head wrapped in a worsted shawl, and declares that it is quite impossible to go out with "the dear girls," Hugh has to go upon what he calls "duty," and generally drops in at luncheon-time to see if he can do anything in the way of chaperoning them; and he never fails to procure tickets for a concert or a box for the theater.

"Poor Hugh!" says Edie, nestling up to him, "he makes himself a martyr for us girls. He would rather be at that odious club, or riding in the row. Now, wouldn't you, Hugh?"

But Hugh smiles in his grim way, and declares that he is only too pleased to be useful; and after a time he gets accustomed to dropping in, and feels that his life is rather a lonely one.

"Gretnam seems to be getting quite a swell," he says, in his indolent fashion, one afternoon, when the duke had just taken his departure.

"A swell," repeats Lady Falconer, who always manages to find strength to come down to the drawing-room when the duke is announced. "I don't quite understand you, Hugh."

Hugh laughs, and glances at Lucy, who smiles back at him softly.

(To be Continued.)

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Lady Falconer suggests that he should come and live with them, and reminds him that there is one spare room which he could have—it is his own house, by the way—but Hugh declines.

"I should only be a nuisance," he says—"I'm better away. I should want to smoke, and there's no room in this nutshell that I could puff a cigar which wouldn't go all over the house. No, I'll just drop in."

And so he goes on just dropping in, and—perhaps it is by accident—that he often finds the girls out, and Lucy Fairfax left in charge, as it were, for Lady Falconer is still too much of an invalid to put in an appearance.

At such times, Lucy Fairfax receives him with a sympathetic smile and her soft eyes, and a little gentle impressiveness that touches him.

Very often at five o'clock he finds himself seated in the coziest chair, with her fairy-like form established at the tea-table; and at those times he feels—well, if not quite happy, at least at peace; for this girl possesses the great charm of adapting herself to the mood of the person in whose company she may be; and her voice, soft and low, falls on Hugh's ear like some subtle music, soothing and flattering. But for that sweet, short dream—that delirium, as he deems it—in which his soul was snared by the heartless Dulcie, he could wish that Lucy Fairfax could always sit beside him there.

Sometimes he resolves that he will forget that short delirious dream, and go back to the time before he fell under its spell—that he will ask Lucy Fairfax to be his wife, and let the past bury its dead; but he cannot bring himself to it yet—not yet.

Very often, before he could finish his tea, there comes a ring at the bell, and the servant announces the duke, who also appears to have a liking for the cup which cheers when it is filled by the fair hand of Lucy Fairfax.

It is wonderful how often the great duke drops in at the little house at Park Lane, and Hugh, who is slow to observe such matters, at last notices that his grace looks much younger than of yore; and that he evidently pays more attention to his personal appearance.

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War News

Messages Received Previous to 9 A.M.

NOTHING FROM RUSSIA

LONDON, Nov. 13.—No official report was received from the Russian headquarters.

FOR EFFECTIVE WORK

PARIS, Nov. 13.—The Inter-Allied War Council was characterized as a "genuine Council in a declaration of Premier Painleve to both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate."

not doubt that the troops whose troops have been fighting upon this front will have adhesion to this Council and Negotiations concerning Russia and Japan. The Council is not to direct the military operations of a general war policy and plans for the allies, and their disposal so as to attain the strongest result possible. The council comprises two representatives each government. Normally it meets in France at least once a month. It rests upon the inter-allied staff which forms a permanent central organ of information and its technical advisers. The decisions of such Council are not to be taken by any particularism. They will have to be made by the respective Governments. It has already heard the objection that it is a unique command. It is open to criticism and from saying that the step was taken is the last in progress.

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