

# Love a Conqueror

—OR—

## WEDDED AT LAST!

CHAPTER XV.

"I certainly do not intend to let you walk up the avenue alone, Shirley," he said, decidedly. "They won't hear my footsteps, you foolish child!"

"But if any one sees you?" Shirley said, faintly.

"Then I have met you, and am seeing you home. My dear little girl, they can hardly be angry with you for accepting the simplest courtesy in the world."

Shirley said no more. She was physically and mentally exhausted with the strain that she had endured all the afternoon, and in her heart she was relieved not to have to go up the dark, dreary avenue alone.

When they reached the great iron gates leading into the Fairholme grounds, Sir Hugh pulled up and sprang down from the dog-cart.

"Wait for me here, Lorraine," he said, as he lifted Shirley down with the careful tenderness which distinguished his manner toward her. "Keep Tippon moving," he added, as Shirley hastened on. "By the bye did you find that note?"

"Yes, Sir Hugh," Lorraine answered quietly; and his master hastened after Shirley, and gently forced her to accept the support of his arm as they went up the drive together.

"The hall door is open," Shirley said tremulously, as they came in view of the house. "Uncle Gilbert is sure to be about somewhere; I must bid you good-bye. Please leave me now, Sir Hugh," she added earnestly. "Good-bye, and thank you."

The deep passionate gratitude in her voice brought a flush to Sir Hugh's face as he took both her hands in his.

"My dearest," he said softly, "I know how happy you have made me! Nay, do not shrink from me, Shirley. I have the right now, and will keep it. Good-night, my wife!"

He stooped toward her, putting his lips to her cheek, for a moment, and then, without giving her time to protest, he turned away and walked quickly down the avenue.

Angry, wounded, and terrified, Shirley fled onward to the house, and reaching the hall in safety, stood leaning breathlessly against the table, physically unable to proceed any further. Even the sound of her un-

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Clark's footstep to the steps without could not give her power to move; and when Sir Gilbert came in, she was still in the same attitude, supporting herself against the table, and struggling desperately against the feeling of faintness which was gradually creeping over her.

"Shirley," Sir Gilbert said sternly, "this is strange conduct. Where did you spend the afternoon?"

"I went—to the 'Manse,'" Shirley found voice to answer.

"To the Manse! Humph! Who accompanied you home? Was that Sir Hugh I saw going down the avenue?"

"Yes—he—"

Shirley made a desperate effort to answer, but her strength failed her. The excitement and fatigue of the afternoon had drained all her force. She managed to reach a chair, and then—doing the very best thing she could have done to avoid further questioning and reproach—she faintly slipped away.

CHAPTER XVI.

A lawyer's private room has nothing very dramatic or romantic in its general appearance, and yet how many a romantic and dramatic story is told within its four walls! Most answers are unexcitable, sensible matter-of-fact, hard-headed men, and how many strange confidence they receive! How often are their words looked for with eager expectation, and how often do their decisions bring either despair and anguish or joy and gratitude to the aching hearts which throbb so fast when the enter the dingy-looking office!

Mr. Duncan's private room was by no means an exception to the prevailing rule. It was a stern, uncompromising-looking apartment, but sufficiently comfortable, especially when now, there was a blazing coal-fire in the grate; and, if walls could have spoken, they might have told many a story of strange import.

For Mr. Duncan was the most eminent lawyer in the capital town of St. John's, a man well known as clever, shrewd, and honorable, a very distinguished member of the legal profession. He was a cold-mannered, stern-looking man, who never allowed his feelings to sway him in any way of business; and, although he was one of the kindest of husbands and most indulgent of fathers, to his clients he was invariably cold, distant, and scornful, and a man of very few words.

He was glancing over the letter which had been received by the afternoon's post one cold day in January—the day after Shirley Ross had met her brother at the Half Moon Inn at Dumfries—when a clerk knocked at the door, and, on receiving permission to enter, handed Mr. Duncan a card saying that the gentleman was waiting.

"It is past the hour for receiving clients," Mr. Duncan said, as he took the card and glanced at it.

"I told the gentleman so, but he begged that you would make an exception in his favor, he would not detain you long, and his business is of importance."

Mr. Duncan considered a moment. "Show him in," he said quietly.

A minute later Sir Hugh Glynn entered the room, and Mr. Duncan received him with his most professional face, but with all the courtesy due to such a distinguished visitor.

Sir Hugh explained the cause of his visit in so few words and in such a frank manner that Mr. Duncan was favorably impressed; his business related, he said, to a question with regard to the Scottish law of marriage; and he proceeded quietly to recite his story.

Mr. Duncan listened in silence,

making no comment whatever until it was ended.

"Am I to understand," he asked then, "that the gentleman wishes to marry another woman, and not the lady he took to the inn?"

"You may understand so," Sir Hugh said, with a little smile. "Is he at liberty to do so?"

"He had better not," Mr. Duncan answered quietly; and a sudden gleam of eager delight flashed into the handsome blue eyes watching the lawyer's face.

"You think then that a marriage has taken place?" Sir Hugh interrogated eagerly.

"I think that there is very strong evidence in favor of marriage," was the quiet answer.

"What would be the result of such a case, were it brought before the law courts?" asked Sir Hugh.

"It is impossible to say."

"But you can give me an opinion, Mr. Duncan, which I would regard as decisive."

Mr. Duncan was not proof against the flattery which the words and voice expressed so delicately.

"My own opinion is that the lady and gentleman who went to the hotel together and passed there as man and wife are married; but I tell you frankly that any of my colleagues might differ from it," he replied.

"Has any similar case been brought under your notice, Mr. Duncan?"

"Yes; but they are not frequent."

"Have they been made public?"

"Occasionally."

"With what result?" Sir Hugh asked, with an intense eagerness which did not escape the lawyer's quick eyes.

"There are no very recent cases, believe," he said calmly; "but the judgment has almost invariably been in favor of the marriage."

"Thank you. Would a proof in writing in any way affect the question?" inquired the baronet.

"Materially," answered the man of law.

"Will you kindly look at these?"

As he spoke, Sir Hugh handed to the lawyer two small sheets of paper each bearing a few words, and on rather creased, as if it had been compiled by an impatient hand. Mr. Duncan looked at them keenly, and when he turned to Sir Hugh there was a light of comprehension in his glance which had not been there before.

"That settles the case, Sir Hugh! In face of such evidence, I do not think any court would give a decision against these having been a marriage. I do not say," he continued smiling, "that the law of this land is irrevocable, but it remains the law."

"Even when consent has not been exchanged?"

"Even so," Mr. Duncan answered quietly, going to his book-shelves and taking down a book, which he opened and the pages of which he scanned rapidly; "although, in the present instance," he continued, with a slight smile and quick glance at the handsome face of his client, "I should think consent had been interchanged. If it has not, it will not alter the case. An eminent judge, in a comparatively recent judgment, has declared that 'consent makes marriage; but he adds that 'there may be unquestionably a marriage where it is a point of fact consent has never been interchanged, and when the parties do not even know that the law holds them to be married persons.'"

Sir Hugh rose from his seat and took up his hat and cane.

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Duncan," he said cordially. "You have relieved my mind of a great weight. I have been suddenly called abroad by my mother's illness, and I did not know whether I was leaving my wife behind or not. I shall know how to act now."

"Are you leaving Scotland to-day?" Mr. Duncan asked.

"Yes; I am on my way to town now. I will look in upon you upon my return, Mr. Duncan; and may I beg that you will consider yourself my legal adviser in the future. I am almost a stranger to this country," he added, smiling. "Until my old uncle left me Maxwell, I know merely what I managed to find out during my yearly grouse-shooting visits. Good afternoon. Do not trouble yourself, I beg."

Mr. Duncan standing at the door of

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his private room, watched him go, and then turned back into his office, with a rather puzzled look upon his face. He was somewhat interested in his client, and he would have been glad to know all the particulars of the case that had been laid before him. In all probability it would be brought before his notice before very long, he thought, as he inducted himself into his great-coat and prepared for his cold walk home; and in this opinion he was not mistaken.

Meanwhile Sir Hugh, wrapped in his fur coat, was speeding southward as fast as the "Mad Scotchman" could take him; and, as he leaned back in his corner of the luxurious first-class carriage, he was smiling to himself at the success of his treachery.

It cost him much to leave Scotland just now; he was longing to see Shirley again and win her love. Now that the law of the land had made her his wife, he would be so tender with her, he would love her so dearly, he would load her with such costly gifts that he could not fail to win her affection at last, and she would forgive the stratagem for the sake of such love. All was fair in love and war, and he could plead ignorance of the law which had given her to him, and so disarm her anger.

But all this must be put away for the present. His mother, Lady Glynn, was lying seriously ill at Cannes, and he must go to her at once. Of course he would write to Shirley from there and prepare her for the denouement. He would be very penitent and sorrowful for the error into which he had led her, but he would plead the impossibility of breaking off the marriage and the advisability of "making the best of it."

(To be Continued.)

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