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THE GUARDIAN SHORT STORY

The Conqueror

By KEITH GORDON

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Manice looked at his watch. It was ten minutes past 4, and he was already late for an engagement. Nevertheless he dashed hastily into the big department store, determined to procure the driving gloves that he sorely needed.

The tired clerks and shining pneumatic tubes seemed to be in league to detain him, and he was strolling impatiently up and down, inwardly reviling the system that made such delay possible, when the sight of a tall, fair girl, also waiting for change, transformed his feelings like the touch of a fairy wand. His impatience vanished; his engagement was forgotten. He had seen his ideal woman!

A weaker man might have failed to detect his chance in the mere passing glimpse of a face in the crowd. Not so Manice. If fate, in effect, said to him, "Don't you wish you knew her?" he indomitably answered, "Trust me—I shall know her!" And so the game began.

Social customs he regarded as so many fences inclosing and dividing the field of action. Under ordinary circumstances he respected these defenses and skirted them decorously until he came to gateways, like any other well bred individual. But the case in hand was comparable only to a cross country ride, when the man who would be in at the death must go over the fences, jump the ditches and stay him not for gateways and bridges.

All of which means that Floyd Manice, usually the most dignified and conservative of men, spent the rest of the afternoon following a slim, erect young woman at a very respectful distance and utterly without her knowledge.

At 6 p. m. he had the satisfaction of seeing her enter a smart trap at Morrinstown, N. J., whither she had unwittingly led him, and satisfied from her manner that she was at home he paced the platform waiting for the train back to town and making plans with an exultant confidence born of long success.

"Going to Morrinstown for the summer, eh?" exclaimed his partner in some surprise when he announced his intention a week later. "I thought you loathed New Jersey?"

"Mistaken idea of yours," responded Manice, with mendacious brevity. "By the way, do you know any one there?"

Events usually moved with business-like precision when Manice started to accomplish an end. Within two weeks from the day on which he first saw his star, as he called her to himself, he was established in Morrinstown, waiting in strong, serene, yet humble expectation for her to appear once more upon his horizon.

The days passed like a procession of snails, but she did not appear, and though through the kindness of city friends he had a number of introductions, he made no effort to discover her identity. He had a strange, sweet consciousness to which he held in spite of disappointment and the deplorable sentimentality into which it was lending him—that she was surely drifting toward him and that each day brought them nearer together.

Near the end of the third week his faith was rewarded. It was on the golf links, and a ripple of peculiarly clear, frank laughter somewhere near him caused him to turn his head. She and a companion were sauntering toward him, every line of her lithe, graceful figure standing out gloriously against the pure background of the sky, her brown hair framing her face in a bewitching disorder.

On this glimpse of her Manice lived for another week, and then his friend, Duncan Brown, descended upon him for the week's end stay. Duncan would have been welcome under any circumstances, but when he announced that a great friend of his, Betty Alston, lived in Morrinstown and offered to take Manice to see her the latter pressed upon him with added fervency, wondering if by chance he was entertaining an angel unaware.

So indeed it proved.

"I think I saw you on the links the other day," Miss Alston remarked, turning to Manice after the greetings were over, and that gentleman always wondered what he said in reply. The one impression that he carried away from that meeting was a confusing sense of having been projected unexpectedly into the very midst of heaven.

That impression, however, was not lasting. Time revealed that if Miss Alston was a guiding star others besides himself were looking, raising their eyes to her and following where she led.

Still he drew a sigh of relief at the thought that he had two rivals instead of one. Always in these matters there was safety in numbers.

Keeping a watchful eye upon two rivals is wearing work even for a strong man. If Manice had been fascinated by Betty Alston's face, at the end of two months it was loverly to him than ever, for the better he knew her the more assured he became of her sweetness and womanliness. Counted by conventional standards, it was a pitifully short time that they had known each other, but he felt as if he had been aware of her through all the thirty-five years of waiting.

Thus his love, like a mighty wave, whose crest, poised for a moment, must inevitably spend itself in foam, broke into words. Simple, manly words they were.

"You are the only woman in the

world for me," he concluded, the color that usually glowed under his tan noticeably absent. "From the first moment I knew it. I would have followed you to the ends of the earth to tell you this, even though I had known that you would refuse me."

Betty Alston, her face as white as his own, turned to him with quivering lips. His earnestness frightened her. But there was Jack Winter—dear Jack with the laughing eyes and the gay smile. And yet Jack would never have followed her out of the crowd, and—

She covered her face with her hands, and Manice, pitted against fate, set his jaw grimly.

"Is there any one else?" he asked at last, and at the gentleness of his voice Betty took courage.

"You don't know how unworthy I feel," she began in a trembling voice. "You see, I don't know myself. I hate myself for it, but I really don't. If you love me like this, I ought to know, oughtn't I, whether I love you or not?"

She looked at him with the puzzled confidence of a child appealing to an elder for help in a crisis. Then suddenly the color came up over her soft, white neck, rising higher and higher until it suffused her whole face, and the eyes that had been gazing so clearly and childishly into his dropped. In that moment her heart was clearer to him than it was to herself.

"Think about it for a week, sweetheart," he whispered, and, carrying her hand to his lips for a brief moment, turned and left her.

"She loves me—she loves me, God bless her! I know it," Manice's thoughts ran during the days that followed, and though the hours seemed endless, not once during that time did he approach her. He shrewdly suspected that his absence would do more than anything else could to reveal her heart to herself.

So sure of his answer was he that he wanted to make the day memorable to both of them. Many plans suggested themselves, but none of them seemed worthy. Then a chance remark of hers filled across his mind, and he murmured, with enthusiasm, "The very thing, my love!"

She had whimsically said to him once that it was her idea of bliss to have Hagadorn, the well known organist, play the wonderful organ at St. Michael's an hour for her alone, and he decided that the persuasive power of money she should have that pleasure.

But to his dismay he found that he was not. He did not understand the gentleman's request, and he refused the offer somewhat haughtily. It was then that Manice appealed to the man, ignoring the artist, and at the end of his brief but somewhat shamefaced explanation Hagadorn was smiling genially.

"I'll do it with pleasure," said he, holding out his hand to Manice.

"And of course you'll know just—well, just the right sort of music?" suggested Manice. "The sort that will—that will—"

"Yes," assented the organist. "I think I know the sort." And they parted in great good humor.

At the end of that rapturous hour of wonderful music in the dim interior of St. Michael's next day Betty simply turned her humid eyes upon Manice and held out her hands. It was not until she had gained the poise and assertion of six months of wifehood that she accused him of taking an unfair advantage.

"As if any girl could have refused such love!" she taunted, ruffling his hair disgracefully. "It was what the papers call claptrap."

Relics of Gold Hunters.

While plowing in his field near Eufaula recently Mr. Charles Gibson uncovered a large number of weapons, some of which were rifles of an old style, some blunderbusses, a few old time pistols and a couple of swords. All these weapons are in a fair state of preservation and are apparently of Spanish make.

According to Creek tradition, a party of adventurous Spaniards, numbering fifty-four, in the year 1664 left New Orleans on burros and went to the territory in search of gold. They secured all the precious metal they could carry, and on their way back they were beset by a band of Shawnees near Standing Rock, eight miles east of Eufaula, and a great battle followed.

The Spaniards, with the exception of two who escaped on a raft, were annihilated.

It is supposed that the weapons plowed up by Mr. Gibson's place are the ones that were used by the Spaniards mentioned above.—Kansas City Journal.

Tortured by a Witness.

"A little flash of humor on the part of a witness will often destroy the best of legal examinations," said a well known lawyer. "Not long ago I had a criminal case in which one of the best witnesses for the prosecution was a negro. Before the coroner he had made two different statements as to the number of times he had seen one of the principals in the case, and I intended to trip him up on it in the cross examination. If he said the first number I should confront him with the other statement from the testimony before the coroner, and vice versa. I thought I had him cornered, no matter how he answered. I was reserving the question for the climax, and finally I asked him in my most confident manner, 'How many times did you say that you saw this child?' He hesitated a moment and then replied in a surly tone: 'I didn't say I saw it at all. I said I seen it.' Even the judge had to smile, and though I hammered away at him, all the effect that I had sought was lost beyond repair."—Philadelphia Record.



Miss Nellie Holmes, treasurer of the Young Woman's Temperance Association of Buffalo, N.Y., strongly advises all suffering women to rely, as she did, upon Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound.

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