

A Broken Vow;

—OR—

BETTER THAN REVENGE.

CHAPTER II.

There was a certain grim honesty about Olive Varney. Without knowing it she had a contempt for the fashion in which her father had set about his schemes. She had loved him as passionately and strongly as it was in her nature to love anyone; she had been bitterly sorry for him, and for his wrecked and thwarted life. But it is probable that, had the matter rested with her, she would have flung herself straight into this business of vengeance, utterly reckless of any consequences. There would have been no hiding and waiting on her part.

Nevertheless her honesty taught her that she must remember her vow to the dead in dealing with the living. That must be carried out at all hazards, and in face of all opposition; she would compromise only as to the manner of doing it. Honesty demanded that she should give her victim fair warning before commencing the fight.

Therefore, before turning her back upon the quaint old city wherein she had laid her father to rest, she wrote to Lucy Ewing. It was a bitterly-worded simple statement; the sort of thing that should grip the heart and tear aside for ever the decent veil that had shrouded Lucy Ewing's father. She set out in exact words that oath she knew so well, and which she had spoken beside the dead man; and she added certain lines of her own.

"You are younger than I am, and I do not mean to take an unfair advantage of you. So I come—openly and fairly—as your enemy. I will do nothing that you can lay hold of, or that shall place me within reach of any law that protects you; but I will carry out what I have promised my dead father, nevertheless. Your father was a villain, and you a poor fool to believe in him so long. There is a grave far away in a foreign country, on which I knelt once, at my father's bidding, and on which I made my vow. How or when I shall begin the work that is mine I shall not tell you; only I want you to know, as some added injury to yourself, that I exist, and that my purpose is unchangeable. I leave this place to-morrow and I travel straight to London, so that you even know when I shall be near you.

"OLIVE VARNEY."

She committed that extraordinary epistle to the post; paid a final calm visit to the newly-made grave, and started for London. And on her journey to London there grew and deepened in her a resentment she had not felt before.

For the first time in her life she was free—in the sense that she had only to follow the dictates of her own heart. Yet she was so far from free that she was still the prisoner of the dead man's hopes and desires; there was no life for her, save that which he had mapped out. He had carefully arranged that a certain sum of money was left to her, which should last for a limited time—until she had accomplished her object. The amazing selfishness of the man was shown in the fact that after that she was totally unprovided for; Daniel Varney had felt that, that being her life work, from his point of view, she had only to accomplish it, and there was an end of her.

It was a dreary journey, and she was not used to travelling alone; but that growing feeling of resentment filled her mind. She remembered the letters Lucy Ewing had written during all those years; remembered how she had grown up with those letters for her guide and her text. She remembered the last one which she had torn up—recollected clearly all the little happy turns of speech—all that new and delightful secret concerning a coming love-story. With that she contrasted her own bitter, subdued life; she resolved that one of her first objects should be to nip that small romance in the bud in some fashion or other.

"Love has not been mine," she thought, as she brooded to herself over the matter, "why should it come to her? I have grown old before my time with thinking of this wrong that I have to set right; why should this butterfly sail through the easy ways of life, and have the best of everything and suffer nothing? Well, her poor little heart is fluttering now, I'll be bound; there are sighs and tears in place of laughter. And there is a dead man calling—calling to me always not to forget. He calls more loudly now to me than he did in life, because he has left everything for me to do."

People who looked at her wondered who she was. She kept herself apart, and on the boat sat quite still, with her eyes fixed towards that distant England they were approaching. She took care, after landing, to select a carriage in which there were no other passengers—an easy thing, because but few were travelling that way. She was a little annoyed to see another

woman select that carriage also and make herself comfortable in one corner. Even while she thought about her own plans she watched this other woman after the train had started.

A woman somewhat older than herself, and plainly dressed in faded black. Obviously a gentlewoman, from a certain refinement of face and manner, and even of small details of dress. She had no luggage with her, although that might have been placed in the guard's van. The chief thing that Olive Varney noticed about her was the fact that she had a curiously wistful, almost tearful, look upon her face, and that she seemed to be anxious, if possible, to speak to her travelling companion. As Olive had no wish to speak to anyone, she withdrew into her corner and sat moodily looking out of the window.

She began to regret the sending of that letter to warn her victim. That had been an act of honesty that was unnecessary; it would have been far better to have worked completely on the plan laid down by the dead man—to have crept into the life of the girl without her knowledge. With that secret power she held, by reason of the letters she had read, how easily it would have been to have made her way in some fashion into the house in which the girl lived; to have crept into her life, as it were, and so have got a grip upon it she never could have now. Yes; that letter had been a blunder—an opening of the gates to the enemy at the wrong moment. She would have given a great deal to recall it.

So completely had she cut herself off from the life she had led so long with her father that she carried with her on that journey everything she possessed in the world. Neither she nor her father had possessed much, and the settling up of his affairs had left Olive Varney with but little except a small personal wardrobe in a trunk, and a bag, then in the carriage with her, which held the small stock of money which she had. With the singleness of purpose that had characterized her father, she saw nothing beyond the indefinite accomplishment of her purpose. The money would last for some few months; after that she must look about to make a living of some kind. In a matter of this kind it is always well to reduce things to their simplest elements. Beyond her trunk, this bag beside her contained all that she possessed.

"I have not been in London for twelve years."

It was the stranger in the other corner of the carriage who had spoken. As Olive turned her dark eyes upon her in some surprise, the other woman gave a weak little laugh, and blinked her eyes and repeated her remark.

"Not for twelve years! It seems strange—but then, everything is strange in this world, isn't it? Ups and downs—and downs and ups; it's what a brother of mine used to call once a big game of 'footie.' And I never thought to come back to London like this."

She bit her lip and turned away her head; Olive Varney, watching her, saw that the tears had sprung suddenly to her eyes. Obviously she was in some trouble, and obviously she wanted to talk about it. Hard pressed for sympathy, too, or she would scarcely have addressed a stranger.

"Your return to London is a sad one?" asked Olive Varney quietly.

"Only as sad as most things," replied the woman, with a little gulp and another biting of the lips. "It's a curious plight to find oneself in after so many years. I've lost everything I possess. I haven't a rag but what I stand up in; I've scarcely a shilling beyond my actual railway fare. Funny, isn't it?"

"How did it happen?" asked Olive, after a pause.

"I'm a governess—and I've been unlucky. Perhaps my methods are a little old; I learnt them such a long time ago. I lost a situation"—she looked out over the darkening landscape, and gave a little quick sigh—"and I couldn't get another. It didn't take long for my little bit of money to get exhausted; and I hadn't a soul in the wide world to apply to. I don't know why I tell you this, except perhaps because you're a woman."

"How did you lose all your possessions?" asked Olive.

"I got into debt at my lodging—deeper into debt every day. Then they began to frighten me—to threaten what they would do if I didn't pay them. They were going to turn me in to the streets; God only knows what they wouldn't have done. So at last I took the thing into my own hands, and left behind me all my boxes and everything I didn't actually need, and walked out. I sold a little trinket that had belonged to my mother, and I bought a ticket and started for London. There are lots of governesses wanted in London; shall soon get work, and then can send for my things. But it's funny

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