

A Broken Vow;

—OR—

BETTER THAN REVENGE.

CHAPTER XI.

Evidently the man was not to be shaken off; the sudden extraordinary knowledge he had gained gave him a power over her he had never had before. During the rest of the journey Olive Varney cast her mind back through the years, and remembered how and where she had met him abroad. Looking at him now she wondered how he could ever have appealed, as he had done at one time, to her girlish imagination; but she remembered bitterly that there had been no one else to do it.

She had no very distinct recollection of his first coming into her life; he had drifted in on some chance encounter or introduction abroad. She had been a mere girl at the time, beginning to understand the dark, brooding nature of the man she called father, and beginning to see, in a vague fashion, that her destiny was totally unlike that of any other girl she met. At that time Victor Kelman had been more prosperous-looking—more of a dandy; he had appeared to have money and to spend it freely. Probably because of his interest in herself he had tried to get from her father something of their history, but in that he had failed. Having the not altogether desirable quality of sticking closely to people if he wished for their acquaintance, it had not been easy to shake him off, and Daniel Varney had simply endured him.

Other memories there were, in after years, when the man had openly admired her, and asked her more than once to marry him. She had refused with some abruptness on each occasion, and had finally lost sight of him. Now, in this most inopportune fashion, he had put in an appearance again.

She learned details a little later on as they were nearing London. He told her that he had been in England and had chanced upon the account of her death. He professed himself terribly shaken by the news; he had gone at once to her grave, and had made enquiries in order to discover it. The next she knew he repeated over and over again that he did not mean to lose again that boy that she was without a protector.

"My dear girl," he said, airily, "it is not to be thought of for a moment. In the first place I am very superstitious, and I should have the shade of your sainted father rising reproachfully before me if I allowed you to fight your way alone. You may think you are strong and self-reliant, and all that kind of thing; and I admit it. But you're totally without experience; until your father's death I will guarantee to say that you never even bought a railway ticket for yourself, or ordered a meal. All the self-reliance in the world won't help you under those conditions."

"I am perfectly capable of looking after myself," she replied haughtily.

"Very well—we'll grant that," he said with easy good-humor. "But, my charming lady, suppose we grant that Olive Varney was quite capable of looking after herself, armed with such property, however small, as her father was able to leave her. But the case of an unknown woman—penniless and friendless—is quite different. Where, for example, are you living?"

"I am living with—with friends," she replied hesitatingly.

"Suddenly found—eh?" he asked, with a laugh. "My dear Olive—why not be frank with me? If your fraud has been properly carried out, as it seems to have been, you can scarcely be living with friends. Think; you are an unknown woman—without a name, unless you have annexed one; yet you are living with friends! And it's not so many days ago that you apparently died suddenly. Upon my word, my dear," he leaned back in the corner of the carriage, and looked at her, and laughed.

"I have never been so interested in all my life. May I ask what these friends call you?"

"I shall not tell you," she replied doggedly. "Have you no mercy—no pity? What have I done in all my life that I should be set upon and followed by such a man as yourself? The world is big enough and wide enough for both of us, go your way, and leave me to go mine. Put it, if you like, that the Olive Varney you knew is dead; leave the woman who stands in the place she occupied to go her own road."

"I really couldn't find it in my heart to do so; I shouldn't be able to sleep at night," he said, with a grin. "You may be in all sorts of dangers, which your innocence and ignorance will not prepare you to meet, and to which you may fall a ready victim. I may be able, with my large experience of the world, to help you. I am in low water, and have practically nothing left in the world; you are, I imagine, in still lower water; were quite a woefully-matched pair. I intend to be brutal in this matter; I shall come with you wherever you are going; I shall remain near you. But for the old affection, which has never died," he bowed slightly in her direction, and for a moment his eyes were sincere—"I might feel like a father towards you. I must be brutal to this extent; that if you attempt to

declare who you are, and sift the mystery to the bottom. Now—how is it to be?"

Her utter ignorance of the larger work of men and things placed her absolutely at his mercy. Above all things at that time, she desired to be hidden—wished to feel that no one could possibly probe her secret; yet if this man declared to the world who she was, all that she had planned so cleverly went to the winds. There was nothing for it, so far as she knew, but to trust him, in part at least; she decided to do so.

"I suppose there is nothing for it but to submit," she said at last, slowly.

"After all, it is not a matter that can concern you, and you have no real object in declaring who I am."

"No object at all," he assured her. "I know who you are, and that is sufficient for me. Why not let us work together; why not let me stand shoulder to shoulder with you, as it were—the one friend on whom you can rely?"

"I'd rather rely on myself," she said gloomily, "but I suppose there's no help for it. In the first place, then, understand that I am known in the place where I live as 'Aunt Phipps.'"

"Adorable name!" he ejaculated, kissing the tips of his fingers. "I love her already. Married—or single?"

"A widow. Never mind how or why I took that name; suffice it that I am supposed to have come back, after many years, to a young nephew, and that I have brought him bad news. My name and that story have carried me into a house where I particularly wished to get, and where no one suspects my identity; in common with the rest of the world, the people I most want to reach believe Olive Varney to be dead."

"Truly exciting, my sweet aunt," exclaimed Victor Kelman, looking at her with a new admiration. "I always knew you to be a remarkable woman now you surpass yourself. And what is the scheme which has taken you to this particular house?"

"Never mind the scheme; there is no person in the house with whom I am concerned—a girl."

"One of the friends of yours," he asked.

"No, indeed," said Olive. "I have every reason to detest her, every reason to wish her harm."

"Then she is my enemy from the start," he cried, shaking a fist at an imaginary girl. "That's settled. Anything else?"

She was silent for a moment or two while the train drew into the station. As she rose from her seat, she looked at him steadily in her cool, calm way—a look that had in it something of contempt. "I wonder if you would be of any assistance to me in any scheme I might have. It might not be too clever a business—which would suit you?"

"I am yours in all things, to the last drop of my heart's blood," he exclaimed, laying a hand on the breast of his shabby coat.

So it happened that the mysterious Aunt Phipps reappeared in Greenway Gardens, Chelsea, with a man who she designated an old friend. And Mr. Victor Kelman, immensely interested in everything and everybody, made himself very agreeable; told the smiling Odley that she reminded him of his mother, and that she brought tears to his eyes whenever he happened to meet her; praised "Aunt Phipps" to the skies in the hearing of young Christopher Dayne; scented a romance as once so far as Lucy Ewing was concerned, and was altogether delightful in his poverty and shabbiness he excused on the grounds of a latent trait of benevolence; even the much-loved Odley blushed when he assured her that he would long since have settled down had it been his good fortune to meet such a woman as herself.

A room was taken for him in another house in Greenways' Gardens, and that room instantly became a paradise—a room of rooms. He had travelled far and seen many things, but never had been so comfortable. He planned to settle in Greenways' Gardens, for the remainder of his existence.

For three days he pervaded the Gardens; coming in to smoke a delicate cigarette with Christopher Dayne in his room at night, and charming the boy with his easy chatter and his accounts of foreign travel and his admiration of the boy's work; behaving with becoming respect to Olive in her capacity of Aunt Phipps. So gradual was the process, and so delicately did he go to work, that he seemed quite like an old friend when, a few days later, he knocked at the door of the billiard-room where Lucy Ewing was and begged permission to enter. And he seemed quite to have forgotten, as he smiled at her, that this was his enemy.

"Pity the sorrows of an idle man, my dear Miss Ewing, and allow me to sit and talk with you," he pleaded. "I am, just arrived from weary wanderings in various parts of the globe, the lives of your people are so wonderful—so beautiful. Here you sit at your daily tasks, and the world goes on, rushing past Greenways' Gardens, as one may say, and you all unheeding,

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