

## THE WORD DARLING.

BY WILLIAM ROSS WALLACE.

"My darling, come sit by me closely, for I need the touch of your hand and the light of your eye. While together our hearts sweet communing will make. As the glad waves that mingle their joy on a lake."

So to his betrothed one he whispered that night: In the little word "darling" what beauty and might! In aught other can more by a mortal be found? It is Love's sacred music—the fragrance of sound.

Nor alone from the wedded, or those to be wed, Is that music of "darling" delightfully shed: Darling father or mother, how fondly it breathes! Darling brother or sister, what home mem'ry wreathes!

Darling friends—yes, the word is for them cherished too, And Humanity's paths with some roses bestrew, Which must make many struggles in life seem divine. That would otherwise offer but dark bowls of brine.

Darling child—O, what tenderness swells in the word. When it is from the lips of the proud parent heard! And the parent, how steals through the heart and the frame. As from Heaven itself, an angelic flame!

Ever blessed be the word with its Eden of love! Ever prophecy speak of the mansions above. Where no hatred to quench it is evermore found. But Affection floats on such a fragrance of sound!

## LESTELLE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE ROSE AND SHAMROCK," ETC.

## CHAPTER VII.

## DARCY PLAYS THE AMBASSADOR.

"Madame never receives visitors," said the footman, civilly but curtly. "It is no use, sir," he added, putting back the gold coin Darcy would have slipped into his palm. "It would be more than my place is worth to let you in."

"You are not forbidden to carry my card to your mistress, are you?"

"No, sir; but it won't be of nouse, I'm sure. I've had double and treble that money offered to me, but I dursn't take it."

Darcy mused awhile, then, on the back of one of Lord Glenaughton's cards, he pencilled his own name, and an urgent request for five minutes' conversation with Madame Lestelle.

By this time, the quiet courtesy of his manner had so impressed the footman, that, throwing open the door of a pretty morning-room, he invited him to enter, and wait there while he went on his errand.

Darcy complied, and sauntering to a window that commanded a view of a small but beautifully arranged garden, had stood there some little time before a slight sound warned him that he was not alone. Glancing quickly round, he saw that a young girl, in a loose muslin wrapper of pink and white, had risen from a desk at which she had been writing, and in blushing irresolution was glancing from the door to his tall form and back again, as if meditating a flight, yet afraid to attempt it. Darcy was not very impressionable, for he had run the gauntlet of bright eyes at several Continental cities without indulging in more than a passing flirtation. The queenly beauty of Ida had dwelt in his memory, and made him a severe critic; yet he mentally acknowledged that he had never encountered a more charming little creature than the young lady now before him. She was below the middle height, but her figure was so exquisitely proportioned that no one stayed to consider whether she was short or tall. A skin of the palest olive, lips of the deep soft crimson tint rarely seen in England, teeth somewhat irregular but very white, and eyes dark, bright, and shaded by lashes that rested on the cheeks, now peachy with confusion—all this he saw in the one long, rapt glance, for which the next moment he stammered an apology.

Before the young lady could make any reply—if she meditated one—there was a crash at the window, followed by the yelp of a dog. A beautiful little spaniel, forbidden admission to the room, had leaped in at the partially-raised sash, but dislodged a heavy flower-vase in the attempt, which fell with and partly upon it.

Darcy, always compassionate, picked up the little creature and placed it in the arms of its mistress, who tried in vain to still its piteous cries. Troubled and frightened, she made a timid appeal to the stranger.

"Oh, sir, what makes Fido moan so terribly? Is he seriously hurt?"

Darcy examined the dog carefully. One of its slender legs was broken; and as he announced this, the face of the young girl blanched, and her large dark eyes filled with tears.

He hastened to soothe her. "Don't alarm yourself; I will bandage the injured limb, if you will permit me, and Fido will soon recover. Have you the courage to hold him while I do it?"

She nodded assent. Her lips were quivering as she saw the sufferings of her pretty favorite, and when the dog licked the little hands that truly yet tenderly restrained him, a few bright drops fell upon his glossy coat.

"You must think me very babyish," she faltered to Darcy, who happened to look up at the same moment: "but Fido and I are old friends, and I haven't much to love besides my pets."

"I should think any lady very unfeeling whose heart would not be touched by the suffering and patience of this animal," Darcy answered; "though I'll own I don't like to see dogs pampered into nuisances. Shall I lay my patient on this cushion? A little careful nursing is all he will require now."

"I am so much obliged to you," said Fido's mistress, gratefully. "What should I have done if you had not been here?"

Then, startled into remembrance that the cause of his visit was still unexplained, she moved towards the bell, saying, with some embarrassment, "I have detained you unwarrantably. Do you wish to see Miss Hill?"

"I am here to beg a few minutes' conversation with Madame Lestelle. My name is Lesmere," he explained; and the beautiful face glowed and paled, the eyes he never wearied of admiring glanced at him shyly, and the rosy mouth expanded into a sweet smile, in which there was evident recognition.

"Mr. Lesmere—the nephew of Lord Glenaughton—the gentleman who traveled so much, and wrote such interesting letters to the newspapers? Ah, sir, we have heard of you often—very often!"

"It flatters me to find myself of so much consequence," Darcy replied gallantly. "May I beg your good offices with Madame Lestelle, to obtain for me the interview I seek? The servant by whom I sent the message does not return."

"Perhaps he knows that he has incurred his mistress's anger by admitting you, sir," was the grave reply. "An actress, if she would avoid calumny, must deny herself the pleasure of receiving any but her most intimate friends."

A sarcastic smile flitted across Darcy's lips. Judging by what he knew of her intimacy with his cousin, Madame Lestelle was not always so punctilious.

"My errand is purely a business one. If you will kindly assure Madame of this, and that I shall not detain her one moment longer than is absolutely necessary, I shall esteem it a favor."

Still the young lady demurred.

"Lestelle might ask if this is not one of the many pretexts made to gain admittance to her presence."

Darcy shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"I will speedily undeceive her. I have not the smallest ambition to be ranked amongst this lady's admirers."

The flush that rose even to the brows of his fair companion warned him that he had said too much.

"Pardon me if I have seemed rude," he added gently. "I merely meant to imply that you are laboring under a great mistake if you attach any other motive to my visit than I have already given you for it."

"But a letter!" she murmured; "would not a letter answer all purposes? After what you said just now; Lestelle would surely be justified—pardon me, sir, if I speak too plainly—justified in refusing to see you."

"What have I said that has led you to this conclusion?" Darcy demanded.

"Enough to tell me that you are not amongst those who wish her well," was the reply, spoken with such sorrowful earnestness, that he hastened to offer some explanation. The bitter disdain with which he was forced to regard the woman who had infatuated Percy need not extend to the pretty friend or relative who so generously defended her.

"Madame Lestelle and I are strangers to each other. I am here solely to communicate with her on an affair of some urgency. If you will kindly use your influence in my behalf, and prevail upon her to grant me an audience, I shall feel much obliged."

"But if I have no influence with Lestelle?" the young lady asked, demurely, a little repressed fun sparkling in her eyes. "If she has so often found me her worst counselor, that she refuses to listen to my promptings?"

Darcy looked perplexed, and, drawing up her little figure with a stately gesture, she added, "I will not attempt to mystify you any longer, Mr. Lesmere; I am the Lestelle you seek."

He was so unfeignedly surprised, that a low, soft laugh broke from her lips. She had too keen a sense of humor not to enjoy his perplexity.

"I cannot help feeling curious to know what sort of a creature Mr. Lesmere expected to behold," she archly observed. "Perhaps a living likeness of Mrs. Siddons, as *Lady Macbeth*; or *Miss Bravassa*, in her page's dress; or that young lady's friend, in old slippers and papillotes."

Certainly, this simply-dressed, graceful girl was so vastly unlike the mental picture Darcy had conjured up, that he found it difficult to conquer or conceal his astonishment. Rallying himself, however, he replied that his long absence from England must plead his excuse for not being better acquainted with the features of a lady who was such an acknowledged favorite with the public.

Lestelle shrugged her pretty shoulders, and pettishly exclaimed, "Oh, sir, pray spare me any more complimentary speeches, I am so sick of them. They were acceptable at first, when I really required encouragement, but now I think I like a sharp critique better than the indiscriminate praise I receive for my performances."

"Of course I can neither pretend to praise nor blame the acting I have never seen, but of Ma-

dame Lestelle's personal charms there can be but one opinion," the gentleman courteously responded.

Instead of smiling or blushing when she heard this, Lestelle sighed, and raised her eyes to Darcy's with a very grave, sad look in them.

"You mean that I am beautiful, that, as yet, late hours and rouge have neither destroyed my complexion nor robbed me of my youth; but I have heard these things said till the repetition disgusts me. No one seems to comprehend that I attach but little value to the good looks, which win me nothing but empty adulation."

Darcy looked steadfastly at the face into which the excitement of speaking had brought such deep tints and varying expression. He was beginning to debate within himself whether the frank, impetuous tones were those of truth, or only adopted for his especial delectation.

"I find it difficult to conceive how a young lady can have learned so quickly to be indifferent to the homage she receives."

"Do you really? And yet to me it is incessantly saddening to be obliged to know that I am valued simply for the amusement I afford my audience. I have not the gift of tragic power. I cannot rouse and sway at will the best feelings of my audience. I am only a singer, whose voice they will applaud while it retains its freshness. A severe illness—a violent cold—and I lose the ability to please. Then what becomes of the homage you spoke of?"

Darcy grew thoughtful as he listened.

"Aren't you taking rather a morbid view of the matter?" he asked. "If you possess the gift of song, there must surely be some satisfaction to yourself in exercising it."

"There is—there is!" she answered, enthusiastically. "Sometimes I sing for myself more than for my audience, and lose all thought of their praise or blame in some delicious melody! Mr. Lesmere," she went on, blushing, and faltering, and clasping her hands as if entreating some great favor, "I should very much like to sing to you."

He was unmistakably gratified, for, independent of a natural desire to hear the renowned songstress, he inherited from his mother a delicate sense of harmony which made him an up-to-date hearer.

"I shall be delighted," he said, following her to the piano, at which she hastened to seat herself. A pile of music lay on a Davenport close by, and she glanced at it irresolutely, turning towards her companion the next moment to ask, with a smile, "What shall it be?"

He named an aria in an opera buffa which was then making a sensation in Paris; but Lestelle shook her head.

"It is too florid, too stagey! Let me sing you something simple—some old favorite, instead." And without waiting for a reply, she began the always beautiful air known as "Gramachree Molly."

Report had not done more than justice to the voice of Lestelle. It possessed that sympathetic charm and purity which distinguished the singing of Jenny Lind; and Darcy listened entranced. Percy, and the errand that had brought him to the house of the actress, were awhile forgotten; yet the only witchery she exercised over him lurked in the mellow tones warbling so charmingly the songs she loved best. One succeeded another, till an hour had passed away, and still Lestelle sang on; and Darcy Lesmere leaned on the piano, shading his eyes with his hand, his thoughts carried back to earlier days by the Scotch and Irish ballads for which he had asked her. Lestelle never glanced towards him. Had she done so, the spell would have been broken. His silence—his long breath of mingled pleasure and pain whenever she paused—told her that he was a rapt hearer, and she was content.

How much longer he would have lingered and listened, it is impossible to say, for the footman came in to announce Mr. Paulton; and Lestelle, the happy light fading out of her eyes, hastily rose from the instrument.

"It is the manager of the theatre at which I am engaged," she said in a rapid whisper. "He comes to arrange with me about my part in a new opera, and I cannot deny myself to him, for he is here by appointment."

Darcy reddened, and bit his lip. What madness had possessed him to loiter here until the opportunity for speaking with her alone had passed away? How humiliating to find himself so ductile in the hands of the siren whom he had contemned Percy for loving. And last, and most annoying consideration of all, what should he tell Lord Glenaughton, who must, even then, be impatiently awaiting him?

By this time, Mr. Paulton was in the room, eyeing him from head to foot, as if very much disposed to resent his presence. The manager was a tall, portly man, with enormous, well-dyed whiskers and moustache, and quick, fiery eyes, that struck Darcy as strangely familiar. But his further scrutiny of this man was prevented by Lestelle, who said, in low tones, "You came here to speak to me on some business of importance, but you see that it is now impossible. To-morrow, however, I shall be disengaged at this hour."

The hint relieved Darcy from his embarrassment; he bowed over the hand she extended. "To-morrow, then, madam, I will call upon you again. Till, then, adieu."

As he was leaving the room, his gaze travelled towards the face of the manager, who, with an impatience he made no endeavor to conceal, was awaiting his departure. Again the conviction that this man was no stranger came over him, and he made an involuntary pause, asking himself where and when he had known him.

The pause was seen, and understood. After a

moment's hesitation, Mr. Paulton smoothed his brow, and came forward, smiling, and bowing low to the perplexed gentleman.

"It seems unreasonable to expect the Honorable Darcy Lesmere to remember such a humble personage as myself. My own memory, however, vividly recalls the time when I had the honor of being useful to him."

"The voice, the eyes, are Wyatt's!" muttered Darcy; and the manager's lips parted in another smile.

"Time has been kind to me," he said, caressing his whiskers, and gazing complacently at his portly form; "and the bequest of a generous relative has given me the means of embarking in dramatic speculations. I hope my honored patron, the Earl of Glenaughton, is well. Kindly make my respectful compliments to him. I do not forget that I once had the honor of brushing his clothes."

There was an undertone of mockery lurking in Mr. Paulton's smoothly-spoken sentences; and the piercing, hazel eyes, that glittered restlessly beneath his dark brows, were almost menacing in their expression.

"This fellow dislikes me, or else it displeases him to find me here," Darcy instantly concluded. But, with a brief, though courteous reply, he went away, for he was too much troubled about his approaching meeting with his uncle to feel interested in the quondam valet, or care to know in what way he had evoked his hatred.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE ACTRESS AND HER GUARDIAN.

When the door had closed on Darcy, Mr. Paulton, with his thumbs in the pockets of his vest, walked towards the window, and ensconced himself in a rocking-chair that stood there. Lestelle had not moved from the spot where she had bidden farewell to her guest; but with head drooping, and hands lightly clasped one in the other, seemed to have fallen into a reverie. Her face had lost the soft glow of pleasurable emotion it had worn while she sang, and had grown cold and hard, as if her thoughts were troubled ones.

"You owe me an explanation," said Mr. Paulton, harshly. "I thought I warned you that no visitors were to be received here whose calls I had not sanctioned?"

"That was when you were my master," she answered, quietly. "Then I had bound myself to obey you. Now the contract has expired, and I am free."

"Not so, I, who made you what you are, am equally able to undo my work. And more—I have constituted myself your guardian by virtue of an authority you cannot rebel against—the request of your dead parents."

Lestelle raised her head, and shot one swift glance at him as she replied, "You have told me this frequently, and I have always answered as I do now: that when your pretended authority merges upon tyranny, I refuse to recognize it."

Paulton smiled, provokingly. "Eh! little one, you are contumacious this morning! But we cannot afford to quarrel till the season is over. Tell me plainly what brought Darcy Lesmere here? Your bright eyes?"

Lestelle crimsoned with resentment. "Did you come here solely to ask me this? If so, your errand is a fruitless one. This house is mine, and I admit to my presence what guests I please."

Mr. Paulton's look when she said this was an evil one; but he answered pleasantly enough, "You are justified, *ma chère*, in reproaching me for neglecting business. However, there is no hurry; I have changed my mind about the opera I intended to put into rehearsal. I have decided to revive 'The Queen's Page,' with you as *Raoul*, and Bettina for the *Queen*; Salvi can take—"

But here he was impetuously interrupted. "I will not play the part of the page!"

Mr. Paulton raised himself in his chair, and answered imperatively, "Chut! you must—you shall! I will not have the opera spoiled by your caprices. A few successes have turned your head. You have the airs in yonder folio. Practise them."

"I will not play the part of *Raoul*!" Lestelle said again, her bright dark orbs flashing with angry determination.

Mr. Paulton sat for a few moments humming an air, and looking at her as he rocked himself to and fro.

"Are you wise to defy me, *petite*? What are your objections to this piece? The dress? Bah! you have donned the page's jerkin before this, and brought down the house by the way you wore it."

"But I hated myself all the while!" she answered. "It was unfeminine; I felt it so then; and now—and now—"

She panted, her bosom heaving convulsively, and Mr. Paulton mockingly repeated her words.

"And now, *ma belle*, you will assume it once more, and achieve fresh triumphs. The first rehearsal shall be on Thursday next. Take care that you are well up in your part!"

Lestelle came a step nearer, and steadily met his gaze.

"Mr. Paulton, you said but now that we could not afford to quarrel just at present."

He nodded.

"Then you must withdraw your opera, or find another *Raoul*. I do not intend to play the character. Hitherto I have yielded my will to yours, because I felt that I owed you something, even while my heart told me that your motives for what you have done will not bear the light."