

# LOVE THE VICTOR.

## CHAPTER VIII.—CONTINUED.

"Me an' Jim Duffy an' Dan Clancy," goes on Canty, in a deeply injured snuff, "went west there to Freshane's where they towld us the first post had been thrown last night. An' we tackled it, an' what wid pullin and dhraggin' we brought it here; but a mighty tough job it was all the same. An' I'm sure we wouldn't have done it at all, miss, if we thought ye would be so down on us in the end; but indeed ye towld—"

"Bless me! the boy's a fool," says Miss Priscilla. "There, go away, Canty, and take your post and your friends with you." Then there is a consultation between Canty and his friends behind the shrubberies, and finally Canty appears again.

"I'm off, miss," he says, pulling his forelock; "but the men says as how they'd be thankful to yer honor for a thrifle. 'Twas as heavy as lead, miss, an' the day meltin' wid the heat, an'—"

"Go to cook. Tell her to give you half a crown and some beer, and then go away,—go away 'forever!' says Miss Blake; "let me never see your face again."

"Why, what have I done, miss?"

"I told you to get me my letters, and instead—"

"Yer letthers, is it? Arrah, why didn't ye say that before, miss? Yer letthers down wid the ould chap in the village, ye say? Sure I'll have them for ye in the twinklin' of an eye. 'The post,' says she, an' 'the letthers' just as aisy. Ayeh! but the quality's quare," says Mr. Canty to the brim of his caubeen; after which he departs first for his beer, and then for his native town.

"Thank goodness, here comes the tea," says Miss Priscilla, with a sigh of relief, as a neat-handed Phillis comes slowly across the garden, an old man following her. Both are laden with tea and cakes, and one or two liqueurs and yellow cream in quaint old silver ewers, and purple plums, and dainty little three-cornered bits of pastry, piping hot.

"Dicky, my dear, and you, Neil, will you bring those rustic tables a degree closer to me? Hero Matilda, place the tea here, and come back soon to see if we want anything. I'm so distressed," says Miss Blake, looking apologetically round her, "that you should have been made uncomfortable by that stupid episode of Canty's; it is really too bad."

"Ah! if you only knew what a treat it has been," says Lady Clontarf, laughing all over again as she thinks of it. It had indeed taken her out of herself, and released her from the demons of regret that have been pursuing her all day and far into last night. She has joined as gayly in the merriment caused by the froxy boy as any of them, and just now her eyes are alight and she is looking charming.

"The Irish peasant in his raw state is not very much to my taste," says Mr. Mannering, critically.

"You would prefer him cooked? Well, I'm not sure he'd do even then," says Mr. Browne, in a tone mildly argumentative.

"Canty now, for example, would be—I should say—tough, unless decidedly overdone. Indeed, I think soup should be made of Canty to insure digestion."

"I have read a good deal on Irish character," goes on Mr. Mannering, ignoring with much dignity Dicky's interruption, "and I have always looked upon the accounts of their wit, and the amount of intelligence conceded to them, as statements that should be taken cum grano salis."

"Oh, certainly," says Dicky, affably, with all the air of one who is generously allowing a point to his adversary. "Roast or boiled, I should say Canty would be the better of that!"

At this Kit laughs out loud, and Vera (who has wandered up to them by this time with her hands full of flowers, and Mr. Burke in her train) laughs too. She—Vera—is sitting on a low garden-chair, and is digging her little, sharp white teeth into a purple plum, with an open enjoyment that suits her.

"Little gourmand," says Gerald Burke, leaning over her chair and whispering into her ear. His pale, calm, intellectual face is alight with all the glory of a first great passion.

Vera, looking over her shoulder, smiles at him, and in her childish rapid way holds

up half of the luckless plum, and puts it into his mouth. "Ah, Mr. Burke, who is a gourmand now!" she says, gravely.

"I wish you would call me Gerald," says the young man, earnestly, in a very low tone, meant for her ears alone. Not that he would have objected to all the world knowing of his love for her, but because it is so sweet to a lover's heart to believe himself alone, at least in thought, with his beloved.

"H'm?" says pretty Vera. She has a most enchanting way of making this questioning sound. She keeps her lips closed when she makes it, and looks up with smiling expectation at the person addressed out of her innocent blue eyes, that always seem full of babyish wonder at the oddities of the great world into which she has fallen in some unaccountable fashion.

"I want you to call me Gerald," says the young man again.

"Doris," says Vera, softly but clearly,—she has a wonderfully clear voice at all times,—calling to her sister across the grass, "Mr. Burke wants me to call him Gerald. May I?"

Naturally, every one looks at Mr. Burke, who has started a little and flushed a good deal. He is certainly confused (in a degree, not having expected Vera's taking such an open action in the matter), but not unbekomingly so, and he now looks at Lady Clontarf very earnestly, as though anxious for an answer.

Though every one looks at him, nobody laughs, not even Dicky Browne, to whom any mischievous sensation is as the breath of his nostrils. There is something about Gerald Burke that demands from his fellows not only affection but reverence.

"Certainly, dearest, if you like," says Lady Clontarf, a tiny pink shade showing itself in her pale cheeks.

"And you wish it too, then?" says Vera, with childish persistence.

"If you do," says Doris, smiling, but the pink shade has grown a degree deeper.

"Ah, then I may call you Gerald," says Vera, glancing over her shoulder again at her attendant swain with the prettiest smile, that really might mean anything at all.

"What a funny little thing she is!" says Kit to Brabazon.

"Very," gravely; "but I don't think she should have asked that question, at least not now,—not before us all."

"Perhaps not; but there isn't a bit of harm in her," persists Kit, though vaguely.

"She is quite a baby in some ways."

"Yes? Well, I'm glad you are not," says Neil.

Soon after this they all rise, and, bidding good-by to Miss Priscilla and Miss Penelope, wend their way homeward through the soft grasses, over which comes to them, from the village, sweetly, faintly, the sound of distant bells, "that music, highest bordering upon heaven."

## CHAPTER IX.

"For, though she died, I would not other make; I will be hers till that the death me take."

"Are not all creatures subject unto time?" Though Kit would have wished the days to linger a-while (because of the sweet companionship they insure to her with the man she loves), still they reluctantly go by, and now his visit at Coole is almost at an end.

A month has passed away, and sunny September has smiled itself to death, and rude October blows shrill blasts above her grave. The leaves are falling, falling, sadly, dolefully. Not a path but is strewn with these poor messengers of death. The "merrie birds of every sort" are silent, and seem half to forget that there was once a time when with glad heart they all with one accord "chaunted aloud their cheerful harmonies." The very streams are sound asleep, or else chilled into so low a murmuring that their voices cannot be heard.

Still the sun, as though in warlike defiance of great Winter's power, sits up aloft, enthroned, and shines persistently. 'Tis but a sad defiance, though; and pale and cold and dreary is the glory of the erstwhile brave Apollo?

But, as to make up for other music, Kit's voice rings sweetly through the sullen air,

as she saunters through the gardens. She is singing with quite an abandonment of self at the very top of her fresh young voice:

"Pack, clouds, away, and welcome day;  
With night we banish sorrow:  
Sweet air, blow soft, mount larks, aloft,  
To give my love good-morrow!  
Blackbird and thrush in every bush,  
Sparrow, linnet, and cock-sparrow!  
You pretty elves amongst yourselves,  
Sing my fair love good-morrow;  
To give my love good-morrow,  
Sing, birds, in every furrow!"

"Thank you, Kit! it is really a very delicate attention on your part, and one I'm not likely to forget. To remember me in this way is more than I dared to expect. I hope the birds will consider your petition, but they have been unsympathetically mute all the morning." Mr. Browne has put his head round a laurel-bush, and is regarding her with an expression full of tenderest gratitude.

"I wasn't thinking about you," says Kit, opening her eyes wide.

"How charming is the bashfulness of the youthful maiden!" says Dicky, rapturously. "But your pretty artifice, my dear, is quite thrown away upon me. I can see through it. Could I not hear you, as you came lifting up this walk, adorning the little birds (by the bye, where are the little birds?) to give you fair love good-morrow?"

"Well?" says Kit.

"Well, that's me," says Mr. Browne.

"I'm sure I'm glad you told me of it," says Miss Beresford. "It might have given rise to much awkwardness, if I had been left longer in ignorance of it."

"It was a beautiful song you sang," says Dicky, thoughtfully. "And yet I think I see my way to improving on it. The rhyming is sadly defective. Now, what would you think of this?"

"To give my love good-morrow,  
Sing, birds, in every furrow,  
To give my love good-morrow."

"Fallow" sounds well—eh?—or perhaps

"Sing, birds, in every furrow,  
To give my love good-morrow."

would be better. Now, which do you prefer—eh?"

"Neither," says Miss Beresford, with decision.

"Strange! Well, but which do you think the best?"

"One is quite as good as the other, in my opinion."

"Or better, perhaps?" suggests Mr. Browne, reflectively. Just at this moment Neil Brabazon comes up to them.

"Dicky has been telling me such news," says Kit, turning to him with a joyful air.

"Yes? good news, by your eyes."

"You hear that, Dicky? But you shall judge for yourself. Without the slightest preparation, he just now told me that he is—my fair love."

"He flattered himself," says Neil.

"By what authority do you say that, my good air?" asks Mr. Browne.

"The best," says Neil.

"I scorn to pursue the subject further," says Dicky. "I shall conclude with one leading question. Pray, sir, if I am not her love, who is? Are you?" Though asked in jest, this proves an awkward question, and silence ensues upon it.

Brabazon, hesitating, looks at Kit, but, as that young lady declines to help him out of his difficulty, being indeed rather more embarrassed than himself, he says, gently,

"Am I Kit?" in a low tone, and with a decided blush.

"Assert yourself, Kit; say no at once," says Dicky, mischievously. "If you don't, this bold bad man will take your silence for consent."

"He may," says Miss Beresford, softly, blushing rosy red; and, turning abruptly to one side she busies herself nervously with a tall shrub standing close beside her. Her business with it is so eminently vague that Mr. Browne is attracted by it.

"I am afraid it is a little early for birds-neating, Kit," he says, mildly, at which they all three laugh, and the spell is broken, and Brabazon, taking her hand away from the cecylons, raises it impulsively to his lips.

"You might at least have spared me that," says Mr. Browne, with tragic reproach. "When a man's heart lies freshly torn and wounded, the sight of—"

"Mr. Brabazon," cries a soft voice, clear as a bell, from one of the drawing-room windows, "Come here; I want you. Can you spare me half an hour?"

It is the voice of Monica. She, too, standing without purpose just inside the

curtains of the window, had witnessed the impulsive caress, and her sisterly mind had been stirred to wrath by it. Not even an objectionable sight itself had seemed so to her as the fact of its having been committed before a third party. What Mr. Mannering says if he hears of it?

Some inward feeling warns Brabazon that there is a bad time in store for him, as he rather slowly obeys her command. Something in her voice—a faintly peremptory ring in it—has struck upon his ear, and given him a timely hint as to what lies before him. It is, therefore, with erect, and a determination to defend himself to the death, that he marches in her presence.

She makes some trivial remark to him, he enters the room—something about the day's arrangements, that is of no interest at all—and then presently, almost before he is aware of it, though mentally determined to be upon his guard, he finds she is talking to him of Kit.

With a little pale face, but with a good deal of light in her blue eyes, she states the case—"Kit's case," as she tells him, almost pathetically. Steadily, without undue haste at any point, she goes through it all—"admiration" for Kit, her girlish "fury" for him, and all the rest of it. Touching as lightly as possible on his want of acumen means to marry, she gives him nevertheless clearly to understand that here is the difficulty.

Throughout he listens in silence, not attempting to edge in a word, and, to tell the truth, having no word to edge; but at last she stops as though for an answer, all she has said, the very blank following on the cessation of her voice brings back to him all his courage with a rush. On a thing at least he is resolved, he will give up Kit, no, not for any one in the world except herself; should she come to him, and tell him it must be so—that the giving is inevitable,—then, he tells himself, he will submit to cruel fate, and let his heart break with as good a grace as he can; but not then!

"You would not have me be the one to end our engagement?" he says at last slowly.

"Engagement!" says Mrs. Desmond flushing warmly. "Kit herself assured me only a few weeks back, that no such thing existed between you. It cannot exist! It would be impossible! You must see that."

"It is exactly what I cannot see. What Miss Beresford told you that there was nothing binding between us, of course I said only the truth. It was, since that words were said—that I shall not be the one to recall."

"You induced her to engage herself to you—here, in this house?"

"It was on the open road—that night all walked home from Kilmaloda."

"It was a breach of honor," says Mr. Desmond, with a little flash from her eyes, "to steal my sister from me? because my own roof?"

"I hope you do not understand the meaning of your words?" says Brabazon haughtily, growing very pale.

"I am sorry if I have said too much," says Monica, impatiently. "But at least you must have known this whole matter would be disastrous to me. Simply—"

"I am sorry," she says, "because I do consider she would be happy as a post—that is," hastily, "unless she was the wife of a rich man. You must see this yourself. And, seeing it you will release her from a promise she may have given." Here she pauses and looks at him anxiously. Her eyes are bent upon the ground, and so she finds his face difficult to read.

"You will!" she says again, leaning a little toward him in her earnestness.

"No; I shall not," returns the young man, doggedly. His voice is very low, very distinct, and Monica's courage declines.

"What if he persists to the end? Is Kit become the wife of a briefless barrister? Kit, who has an absolute genius for doing herself, and likes a new gown once fortnight?"

"I think you should not give me such a decided answer," she says, more softly. "But whatever hard things I may say, I have said to you, you should forgive me, remembering how I have only her interest at heart, and that it is for her sake alone."

She is such a dear, dear girl that it seems to me a terrible misfortune that she should be induced to do this thing."

"It is because she is such a dear girl that I feel I cannot firmly."

"You cannot seem to me. Pounds a year. How can she to a girl account?"

"She had to fight it out. And I suppose things, and never. Woeful times, and at out the carriage. 'We could not comfort to,' says 'But should throwing our fashion. 'be happy?' 'I think one of those make happy money can be heart and sudden out 'The best 'And you sweetest give poverty.' 'It is a name for a lies before sides, I have 'I don't! Desmond, nasty. S of despair of tears. tall, agitated, most though we indeed carzon is before 'Then engagem he will ne 'I shall mean this to me of I her heart encounter no doubt consider shall con shall ind her. I you quite 'I quite most soft wrathful 'I am of me,' dignity. I gave u me, by: don't be wise th you cou as that 'Yes 'Yo cle's to turning gently. 'No steadily please 'She l a sigh 'Wh chair a 'Ol seven for the: deter He is fish at grief-somes

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