

LOVE THE VICTOR.

CHAPTER III.—CONTINUED.

"Oh, it is hard that I must say all this for myself," she says, in a stifled tone of shame and angry reproach.

"I know what you mean," he says, confusedly—"that we shall be husband and wife in name only. But consider: this," gravely, "is a step that once taken is difficult of recovery. And—what will the world say?"

"Why need the world know?" exclaims she, eagerly. Her hands have fallen from her face, and she has come a degree nearer to him. The mask of indifference has fallen from her beautiful face, and for the first time he sees all the earnestness of which it is capable.

"There are such things as servants," says Donat, gently. "Still"—seeing the shadow that crosses her face—"as you have taken this idea so much to heart, I am willing to defy the world with you."

"You consent, then," she says, with a sigh of the most intense relief. "I thank you. You have given me back my self-respect. You don't understand that, perhaps, but you have. Now, indeed, it is an honorable sale between us two. You shall be free to come and go as you like, and I shall be free too. But, wherever my freedom leads me, I shall give you back upon my death-bed your name as clean as when I took it."

Great tears stand in her azure eyes.

"For you are to know that," says Clontarf, quietly. Then, after a slight pause, "You will marry me soon?"

"Whenever you like."

"Next month, then? will that hurry you too much?"

"No, I think not. I dare say if I make a point of it I shall be ready by then."

"And where will you like to go? we must arrange that, I suppose. So many questions are asked. Rome? Spain? Norway?"

"I should like Paris," she says, a little timidly. "We need only stay there a short time. You would like to be home for the shooting, would you not?—and—we both know Paris so well that we cannot be bored there."

"True." A grim smile crosses his face: there is, however, a touch of amusement in it. To hear one's bride providing against that king of terrors, boredom, is in itself unique. "Everything shall be exactly as you wish it," he says in a friendly tone. "Come," smiling, "you must not begin by regarding me as an ogre. It must be bad to have to take a husband at all on such terms as ours, but—"

"Or a wife either," murmurs she, her eyes very sad and prophetic.

"I shall feel ashamed if you compare our relative positions," says Clontarf, gently; "Do not force me to acknowledge, what I already know, that on all points I have the best of the bargain. Do not be ungenerous."

"I have many things to thank you for," she says, slowly.

"Well, now I think we have pretty nearly arranged everything," says Donat, cheerfully. "In the future, friendship, I hope, lies before us; let us begin it now." He takes her hand again, and, bending over it, presses his lips to it very lightly. It is as cold as death. She smiles faintly. She looks utterly weary and overdone.

"Now I must go," says Clontarf, seeing her ever-increasing pallor.

"Good by," she says, calmly. As he leaves her and walks down the room to the door, she still stands erect, and as he makes her a final salutation at the door she smiles again, and even manages to return his bow. Then, as the door closes on him, she gives way, and, sinking into a chair, covers her face with her hands and bursts into tears.

"She is handsome, but an icicle," says Clontarf to himself, as he slowly descends the stairs. "So much the better for her, as I should certainly never have been able to fall in love with her. She is without feeling, and much too difficult. All things considered, her little arrangement, if slightly embarrassing, is a very sensible one."

Thus musing, he turns an angle of the staircase, and finds himself unexpectedly face to face with an old woman.

She is evidently a little lame, because she supports herself with an ebony walking-

cane, and keeps one hand upon the balusters besides. She looks keenly at the young man out of two dark piercing eyes, and by a gesture brings him to a standstill.

"Well, and how has your wooing sped?" she asks sharply.

Clontarf, amazed, stares at her in turn.

"I really cannot remember," he says, hesitatingly, "that I have ever had the—"

"No, you have never had the pleasure of my acquaintance until now," interrupts she, brusquely, "and a very little of it, let me tell you, young man, would use up all the pleasure. Your father will agree with me there. He knows me, or thinks he does, and I know him, and what his value is which in truth isn't worth talking about! My name is Costello, and it is my niece with whom you were conversing just now. Well, as I have now satisfied your niece, answer my question. Is it yes or no with her? Have you brought matters to a crisis at last? How have you sped? Eh?"

"Madam," returns Clontarf, gravely, "your niece has done me the honor of accepting my hand." He is not at all sure whether he is amused or angry.

"And you have done her the honor of accepting her fortune," snarls the old woman, giving her stick a thump upon the floor. "And now, doubtless, you and your precious father think you are at liberty to make ducks and drakes of it, and that you have bought it dear enough by bartering for it your barren title. But I tell you no, no, no! with three or more emphatic thumps of the ebony stick. "I'll see that her money isn't squandered. It was hardly and honestly earned, and shall be kept for her for whom it was intended. I'll fight, step by step, and penny by penny, any rascally lawyers your father may choose to send about settlement. I'm her guardian in a certain sense, and I'll see her righted. So let that old dandy beware."

"Madam," says Clontarf.

"Hold your tongue," says Mrs. Costello.

"I'm not afraid of you either, though you are young and handsome. And as for your father, tell him to be prepared. I shall circumvent him on every point. I give him fair warning. Let him know from me, flourishing the stick again, "that my mind is made up."

"I assure you, madam," begins Clontarf, haughtily; there is no difficulty about deciding between the amusement and the anger now, he is literally fuming with rage.

"You needn't," interrupts she again, contemptuously, "on this subject I shall assure myself. Don't give yourself any trouble, my good boy; I'm equal to the occasion. There! go—and," severely, "tell that old man, your father, that Anna Costello has her eye on him!"

With this she hobbles away from him, and mounts with difficulty three steps. There, however, she pauses, and looks down again upon the stricken if indignant Clontarf.

"Tell him, too," she says, in a grating voice, "that he may as well give up the powder and patches and juvenile airs now, because the wrinkles of seventy don't go well with 'em, and he's that if he's a day."

With this last gentle thrust she disappears.

"What an abominable old harridan!" says Clontarf, when he has recovered sufficient energy even to think again. "And so this is my aunt! I see I am to gain something by my marriage besides money." Here he descends a step or two, but slowly and thoughtfully, and finally stops short again.

"Bless me," he says with a sudden rush of pity, "what a wretched life she must have led that poor girl upstairs!" He seems really distressed, but being Irish, quick change in his mood is a necessity to him, and presently he bursts out laughing.

"How she does love the governor!" he says. "His 'juvenile airs!' mimicking her tone—'ha! ha! 'tis a pity not to tell him of it; only if they came together afterward there might be blood shed. And as for me! why—here his unfeeling hilarity dies a sudden death—'she accused me of she insinuated that—that—oh!—really, now you know!' says Clontarf, indignantly, as though appealing to an imaginary audience; after which, pulling himself together with an angry abrupt, he runs rapidly down

the stairs and precipitates himself into his cab.

CHAPTER IV.

"Love will not be constrained by mastery."

To-day, though slumberous August, has just given place to golden September, & so sun is burning as fiercely and madly as in those lusty days of his youth when he made love to languid July.

Every blade and leaf is quivering beneath the intensity of its regard; a yellow mist is hanging over the distant sea. The cattle far away in the fields are lowering piteously; some, more fortunate than others, kneel-deep in water, are chewing the cud contentedly, regardless of their sisters' complainings; a little petulant wind is dancing through the shrubberies, making a tender music as it goes, and adding another harmony where

"Every sound is sweet,"

Myriads of rivulets hurrying through the lawn,
The means of doves in immemorial clime,
And murmuring of innumerable bees."

All these sweet sounds, and more, fall dreamily upon the ear to-day.

It is still summer; there is not a thought of autumn, or death, or decay, in all the genial air. Some late roses climbing up the veranda of Kilmalooda—the residence of Lord and Lady Clontarf—are hanging their heads wearily because of the unwonted heat, and are crying sadly in their dumb fashion to be plucked and carried in-doors to the cool and shaded rooms beyond.

Kilmalooda is old, grand, and massive. It had originally belonged to an impecunious Irish peer, but had been thrown into the Land's Estates Court, and pulled out of it again by old Costello, who, having tired of the novelty of a fashionable house in town, had decided on trying the effect of a country residence—a "baronial residence," he always called it—upon his neighbors and associates.

Kilmalooda being in the market, and having been the property of "a real swell" (old Costello again), he bought it, lands, furniture, live-stock, everything, just as it stood. The furniture, however, being old, dark, subdued, and absolutely priceless in its way, was an abomination in the eyes of its new master, who had a hankering after gilding and glass, and indeed a generally lively taste on most matters. He had actually given directions for the remodeling of the house inside, and for the introduction into it of many impossible articles, calculated to make weak eyes water and stout hearts quail, when kindly death stepped in to the rescue and carried him off to a land where, let us hope, gilding is unknown.

A balcony, reached by marble steps, runs along all one side of the house; it is up this the roses are creeping, and it is on to this that just now Lady Clontarf steps lightly. Pushing aside the frail lace curtains of the drawing-room window, she comes from the dusk of the shaded room within to the bright and dazzling warmth of the open air.

She is clad in a soft blue clinging gown—a blue so pale, indeed, as to be almost white. Her eyes are bright and clear, and full of the days' content. Her lips are smiling. She has now been three weeks Lady Clontarf. Her brief honeymoon has come to an end, and yesterday she returned to her old home. No cloud is in her sky, no suspicion of evil in her heart. She and her husband are as good friends as any one could desire. As though the beauty and freshness of the day have entered into her soul, she throws off the air of cold indifference that has grown almost habitual to her, and lets her lips part in a little happy song. She has gained the topmost rung of her ladder; her ambition is satisfied. She has, she tells herself, all she was determined to obtain—rank, position, the consideration of the world.

The scent of the red roses is stealing up to her, the murmuring of a tiny burn in the garden below as it tumbles over its brown pebbles reaches her ear. Far, far down below, the smoke from the tiny village of Rossmoyne rises up in thin gray blue columns and quivers in the ambient air. How fair a world it is, how sweet, how tranquil! "Poor dad," she says to herself, with a smile that ends in a sigh. "How pleased he would be if he could only see me now!"

And then, somehow, she falls to thinking of how, if he were alive now, he would be going about boasting to everybody, in that loud voice of his, of "my son-in-law, Lord Clontarf, and my noble relative the marquis—my girl's father-in-law, don't you know?"

At this she grows a little hot, and her pale cheeks deepen in tint; she draws her

breath quickly, she is conscious of a positive sense of relief in the knowledge that it is now forever out of his power to so offend, or to bring that horrible sense of shame home to her. Then follows a sharp pang of keenest self-reproach, and she upbraids herself bitterly for the cruelty of the thought that could make cause for rejoicing out of a father's death—a father who, with all his faults, had at least never been anything but kind to her. A sigh escapes her, and the glad light dies from her eyes. The sun seems to have faded a little, the brook runs but slowly, and all the music is gone from it. Her eyes as she gazes at the distant ocean are full of tears. A moment since she had been glad and exultant, now "her joy to sorrow lifts."

A servant, approaching, hands her a packet.

"With Lord Dundeady's compliments, my lady, and, as he is driving over here in about an hour's time, he hopes you will permit him to take luncheon with you."

The marquis' home—Dundeady Castle—is situated about six miles from Kilmalooda.

Doris gave him an answer, the man retires. Turning the packet over and over in her pretty slender hands, she wonders curiously what a note in it. She and her father-in-law as yet have been but bare acquaintances to each other, and this little message from him lying still unopened on her palm may mean to her nothing at all or a very great deal. Its coming has already done her good. It has roused her from her remorseful reverie. Almost she has forgotten her melancholy of a moment since, and her lips have recovered their pleased expression. As yet that little toy, her title, has not lost for her its first freshness, and she thinks of it again (now that the servant in his address has reminded her of it) with a certain amount of satisfied vanity. Then she breaks the seal of the packet.

Opening the morocco case it contains, she gazes upon a very ancient and exquisitely lovely diamond necklace, that glitters and sparkles in the brilliant sunlight so as to almost put the rays of Phoebus self to shame. A few words in Lord Dundeady's writing are folded up inside the cover of the case; taking them out, she reads them hurriedly:

"Rummaging in an old bureau just now, I found this. It was my grandmother's, it is yours—with my love! I compliment it, in thinking it almost fine enough to rest upon your neck."

Thus the old bean. Doris, delighted both with the gift and the note, laughs aloud.

"Eh? What is that I hear?" cries a shrill voice from behind the curtains. They part again, and the old woman, Mrs. Costello, supported by her stick, hobbles into sight. "Murdoch tells me that grinning old fool is coming to luncheon. What for now, I wonder? What does he want to beg, borrow, or steal? Eh? What's that in your hand, Doris? You're hiding something from me. Yes, you are! I am not blind yet, though I dare say many a one would have me so. What bauble is that?"

"A present from the marquis," says Doris, holding it out in both her hands, that her aunt may see it in all its excessive beauty. "A diamond necklace that belonged to his grandmother. Is it not charming? Is it not kind of him?"

"Diamonds!" says Mrs. Costello, regarding with contemptuous disbelief the exquisite thing that lies glittering in Doris' palm. "Where would he get diamonds at this time o' day? Now, mark my words, the little of 'em he ever had are sold or mortgaged this many a year. His grandmother's, forsooth! It's time now he forgot he ever had a grandmother! Diamonds, said he? Ay," begrudgingly, "Irish diamonds, it may be; any one would know by the look of them they weren't genuine things."

Angry and disheartened, Doris closes the jewel-case, and turns away.

"Ay, ay, ay," snarls the old woman, vehemently. "Turn from me now to your grand new relations. Quite right; quite right; my lord the marquis of Carabas has claims on your filial duty, no doubt! Go with the tide, girl, and forget what—Eh?" with a brisk change of tone, "what's that? Wheels, wasn't it? That's the old deceiver, I suppose." She hobbles toward one of the doors, and then stops again. "Don't think I'm running from him," she says; "with your good eye, my lady, I'll see him before he leaves, and tell him again what I think of—Warn him of that, with my love—Eh? Do you hear? with my love."