

LOVE THE VICTOR.

CHAPTER XIII.—(CONTINUED.)

"Now, one last word, Brian," says the marquis, taking his foot off the step of his brougham as he is about to leave. He is very friendly with Desmond, having known him even a little longer than he has known his son. "Remember what I said about moderation, and repeat it to your uncle. I know even more of how things lie than I choose to say. It is the better part of valor to humor, or at least to pretend to humor, these wretched bores that surround us, until brighter days dawn."

"I fear they lie behind the horizon," says Desmond, who is standing beside him.

"The whole thing is so absurd!" says the marquis, with his customary shrug. "A shilly-shallying government will never do for a hot-headed peasantry such as ours. What they want is a thorough acquaintance with the effects of a cavalry charge and the touch of cold steel. But, as we may not teach them that, why, moderation, my dear Brian, moderation is the word."

"I am afraid I shall find it difficult to convince The Diamond of that," says Brian. "I shall give him your message, my lord, nevertheless."

"Make him take it to heart," says the marquis, quite earnestly, for him, "or he will be making us a present of Coole as a bonfire one of these dark nights. Tell him from me—airily—that, cold as the weather grows, I should object to warming my hands at such a fire as that."

"I hope you won't have the chance," says Brian, laughing. "Oh, I dare say we shall get off."

"I don't know. They expect so much, you see. It isn't master and man now; it is man and master. A very well-to-do tenant of mine, McCarthy, came to me the other day to tell me he could by no means produce his rent. 'I'm broke,' said he. 'Good heavens!' said I, 'how distressing! Where?' He was good enough to explain. 'All I want,' said he, 'is your consideration.' 'You shall have it, and instantly rang the bell for whisky and water. 'All I want,' said I, 'is my rent.' I got it—after a while, you know; after a while. Yes, they require a great deal."

He sighs profoundly, smiles benignly upon the two young men, and finally stepping into the brougham, is soon out of sight.

"There is a man who has got in all his rents, has steadily refused to make a single statement, and is still on excellent terms with his tenantry," says Desmond, staring after the departing carriage with admiration in his eyes.

"The governor is certainly always there," says Desmond, nodding his head. "He is as clever as you like."

"It is getting late. I wonder if they have finished their gossip," says Brian, alighting presumably to his wife and her friends in the drawing-room.

"I'll go and see. Go on you to the billiard-room again," says Clontarf. "If they haven't, you may as well have another cigar with me before you go."

CHAPTER XIV.

"To such slighted and subtleties
In women lie. For as long as bees
Are they, usually men to deceive.
You love I best, and shall, and other none."

In the drawing-room it is now growing dusk, but the fire is so glad of heart that it is making the very walls of the room blush with the rosy warmth. Mrs. Costello, finding her "occupation over," with the departure of her foe the marquis, has taken herself off to the myotic recesses of her chamber and the companionship of her low-suffering maid.

Utterably relieved by her welcome absence, the four girls (for, in spite of that most beautiful boy in the nursery at Coole, Monica in appearance may still be classed as one) are sitting chattering gaily over the fire.

All troubled thoughts seem to have slipped from the mind of Doris. She is sparkling with animation, and is entering into the discussion on hand with an esprit most admirable. She is half-sitting, half-lying on the hearth-rug, in a position full of careless grace, with her head against Monica's knee—she is very fond of Monica—and is altogether as unlike her usual calm, cold self as it would be possible to imagine.

"I think I never saw Gerald look so handsome as he did last night," she is saying. "His eyes were so dark, so full of that most blessed of all things—hope. Generally he looks too melancholy."

"Mr. Burke? Oh he is delicious," says Vera, in her soft cooling voice, now ripening with laughter, as though over some irresistible recollection. "He takes life so altogether au grand sérieux that he turns it into a comedy for the rest of us! As the 'Glaour' or the 'Corsair,' his appearance alone would insure him a fortune on the stage."

"He may surely be considered in a more kindly light than that," says Lady Clontarf, some carefully-suppressed disappointment in her tone. "He is both earnest and reliable. When I look at him it always occurs to me how easy a thing it would be to learn to love him."

"Yes; he is very lovable," says Monica. "Is he? One hardly knows. I don't say," says Vera lightly. "I don't think I shall know what love is at all—at least that kind of love," shaking her lovely blonde head. "Do you, Dody?" This to Doris, who is looking somewhat thoughtful.

"I don't know, darling. I"—sadly—"hope so."

"Why, Dody, what a look! Are you an advocate of love? It must be a horrid thing, I think, because the very thought of it has made you grave."

A second later, as though some knowledge has come to her too late, she flushes crimson all through her perfect skin, and tears (unwonted indeed) spring to her eyes. Surprisingly she leans forward until her fingers can close upon a ribbon that adorns Doris's pretty gown. Having secured it, she holds it tightly, though why, she hardly knows; but all that evening, and ever afterward, her manner toward her sister is tinged with a deeper tenderness.

"It should make no one grave," says Kit, with sudden warmth. "It should only make one happy. To love, to feel that one is loved in return, is life indeed."

"If one loves wisely," says Monica, making a feeble effort to support her cause.

At this Vera laughs irreverently.

"To love wisely is to love to order. Is that 'life indeed'?" she asks, artlessly.

"After all, where lies the magic in this mighty love? 'Lookers-on,' says they, 'see most of the game.' I should think the knowledge gained by their eaves-dropping would cure them effectually of ever playing at love! Lovers, as far as I can see, are the most miserable class of beings extant. Now, I ask you all, who is the most wretched-looking person you know?"

"Mr. Mannering, I think," says Doris, laughing, led to this answer by the remembrance of a conversation that took place last night between her and Vera.

"Ah! And I'm sure he is a victim to the untender passion," says Vera, lightly. Neither she nor Doris is aware of the unhappy man's predilection for Miss Beresford. "He is stupid enough for that or anything. And he can't dance, no, not a bit. How I hate a man who puts his name down on one card and then knocks one to pieces! A mean take-in, I call it."

"He knows as much about waltzing as the man in the moon," says Kit, with keen appreciation of his demerits.

"He is quite too beyond everything," agrees Vera, with a dainty shrug.

"Poor man! Well, yes—really, I think he is," says Doris, reluctantly, yet with a latent sense of amusement in her tone.

To Monica this was terrible. She had said a sweet word or two for Mr. Burke a moment since to please Doris, yet now Doris has gone over to the enemy (albeit unwittingly) and has given her vote against Mr. Mannering. Are they all bent on knocking her pet schemes about her cars and reducing her Kit to poverty?

She sighs forlornly. Of course Doris does not understand how it is with her; she wishes now she had made her a partner in her design, and had let her see how essential it is to Kit to secure a *bon parti*, and how impossible it is she should be allowed to wed a man without a penny. She glances at Kit, and can see that she is revelling in the unanimous verdict returned against her English adorer, and that her face is wreathed in smiles. The whole scene is of course

very palatable to her, an absolute feast of cakes and ale.

"It's his chin, I think," says Doris, breaking the momentary silence, and speaking in a tone of deep compassion. Monica cannot avoid knowing she is alluding to Mr. Mannering, who certainly does recede in that direction.

"No, it is not," says Kit.

"It is his legs," says Vera, solemnly; whereupon they all give way to laughter. Even Monica, after a short but decisive battle with her inclinations, gives way too, and laughs as merrily as the rest.

It is at this moment that Clontarf comes to the door, and a standstill. The different sounds of merriment reach him, but one is clearer to him than all the rest. It is sweeter, more musical—*stranger!* More by instinct than by knowledge, he knows it is his wife's laughter to which he is listening.

The room, except where the fire penetrates, is sunk in darkness; his tall form, standing in the door-way, is lost in shadow. Silently he stands and gazes on the group before him, or rather on its central figure. Doris is still stretched in a languid graceful fashion upon the rug, her head leaning against Monica. The bright flashes of light from the fire are playing among the gold brown threads of her hair, and lighting up her pure and perfect profile. One hand is thrown negligently above her head, the other toys idly with a gigantic Japanese fan; and still, as he watches her, the low sweet laughter issues from her lips.

To others she can talk! With others she can laugh! To, and with him alone she is ever the same—an emotionless, if beautiful, statue. Anger that is almost akin to hatred, rises in his heart as he watches her; and yet—

A great longing to hear her laugh in his presence makes him approach them somewhat abruptly; but as the light of the fire, falling upon him, reveals his tall figure, the mirth dies from her face, and with a soft exclamation she springs hastily to her feet.

To any ordinary woman of his acquaintance he would have said, "Don't let me disturb you," or something like that, and would probably have pressed her back again smilingly into her comfortable position; but to Doris he cannot say it. He is indeed both wounded and indignant at the manner in which she has acknowledged his coming. It is terrible to him that he should be treated as a bugbear, a wet blanket, one whose presence must perforce put an end to gaiety of any kind.

He is about to explain why he has come, when the other men, following him, save him the trouble.

Sir Watkyn Wyldc, shuffling cautiously up the room in the semi-darkness, has two or three providential escapes from a sudden death. Every chair and table in his way is as a pitfall laid for his destruction, and over each and all he stumbles heavily, in spite of the juvenile glass he has screwed into his left eye. "Why the deuce can't I see 'em?" he asks himself, indignantly, when he has just saved himself from falling over a *prie-dieu* by clutching wildly at a Queen Ann cabinet. The strongest glasses are of little use without some sight behind them, and Sir Watkyn's vision is by this time worn to a thread. With a suppressed curse upon the fools who prefer fire-light to the honest glare of lamps, he totters feebly up the room to where Vera is sitting, and sinks into a lounge beside her with an aged groan, which he vainly endeavors to pass off as a sigh.

Gerald Burke, whose younger sight has conducted him with safety through the furniture quicksands with a swiftness not to be attained by all the double eye-glasses in Christendom, is leaning over the back of Vera's chair as Sir Watkyn arrives, and now stares down upon the dilapidated remains of that old beau with a surferance born of a noble deference for age.

"What light can be compared to the tender glow emitted by pine logs?" says Sir Watkyn, with a burst of feeble enthusiasm meant to carry off the remembrance of the tottering and the groan, and to make the listener understand that the difficulties encountered during his journey up the room were due to hate, not to want of sight. It is so soft, yet so brilliant. It seems to add even a deeper beauty (if that be possible) to a complexion such as yours."

He says this, leaning in an impressive manner toward Vera, with what he fondly but erroneously believes to be a sparkle of passion in his withered eye. The general effect of this maneuver is so mournful as

almost to reduce one to the verge of tears.

The poor old man thinks he is looking into Vera's lovely orbs as he makes his little compliment, but, in the gentle dusk of the fire-light he has so kindly lauded, he has missed his aim, and is staring with senile adulation at a marble knob upon the chimney piece instead. The mistake, to the lookers-on, is ghastly.

"Ah, Sir Watkyn, I doubt you are a sad, sad flatterer," says Vera, smiling prettily. "Her mouth full small, and thereto soft and red," is parted, until all the little oven tooth within, pale as pearls, can be seen—alas, alas! but not by Sir Watkyn! His glassy gaze has now wandered from the chimney-piece to the oak carving on the back of her chair, which, being of a shiny description, he again mistakes for her eye.

"No, no. No, really," he says, quite doled by the little touch of reproach in her tone. If she had said he was a "sad, sad flirt," he might, perhaps, have been even a degree more enraptured still.

"But yes, indeed, and it isn't very kind of you; you shouldn't try to turn our heads," says Vera, letting her fan close with a tiny snap, that she may touch him with it on the back of his hand lightly, delicately.

Her manner to him is just a little different from what it is to others. She does not say, "Am I?" "Do you?" "Is it?" in the childish, helpless fashion that suits her so wonderfully; she treats him rather with a tender gaiety that somehow suits her too—a playful sweetness, that has in it just the barest *souçon* of coquetry.

"Some people it is impossible to flatter," protests the old man, making a futile dab at her fan, as though to retain it, (and perhaps the hand that holds it), trying meanwhile to look as if he had said something hitherto unuttered.

"Sir Watkyn," says Doris at this moment, in her pleasantest tone. He is to her an object of positive aversion, but anything is better than seeing him next to her pretty *Bede*. "Sir Watkyn, come to me. I really must have your opinion about this subject."

Thus entreated, the ancient baronet perforce rises once more, and, after a terrible encounter with a tall footstool that nearly precipitates him into Monica's arms arrives at the side of his hostess.

"It is awfully good of you to be so kind to that old man," says Gerald Burke, bending over Vera; "but—but I think I would not flatter him quite so much if I were you; it will make him troublesome."

"It was he flattered me, wasn't it?" says Vera, mildly. "He said something pretty about my complexion, didn't he?"

"You should not have listened to him." "Why?" with grieved uplifted brows.

"Was it untrue?" "His compliment was such a finished one, and so original, you cannot want me to pay you another," says Burke, a little on edge in spite of himself.

"No—oh, no!" says Vera, tranquilly. "But what you say is right. He did put that little speech about my being impossible to flatter, very nicely, I thought too."

An overpowering desire to look into her face seizes Burke. He accomplishes it. Nothing can be calmer, sweeter, than her expression, nothing less suggestive of hidden meaning of any sort.

"Little speeches of the sort you mean should at least possess the merit of being one's own," he says, shortly.

"Of course,"—thoughtfully: "that was what you meant just now: when you said he was 'so original,' wasn't it?"

"I am afraid it wasn't," said Gerald, slowly. "One ceases to be original so very early in life that I fear even Sir Watkyn hasn't a chance of being so now."

"If he can't be that, he can at least be agreeable," says Vera, ever so sweetly, with a frank uplifting of her eyes to his. "You cannot deny that. If you do,"—smiling—"I shall say you are jealous of him."

"Jealous of a galvanised old mummy like that! No," says Mr. Burke, coldly.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Minister Lowell says of his successor, Mr. Phelps: "He is a gentleman of high character and marked independence. He is most agreeable in his manners, and has fine social qualities. None but a distinguished and agreeable man could have been chosen to be President of the American Bar Association. Both countries are to be congratulated on Mr. Cleveland's wisdom as shown in selection of Mr. Phelps as my successor."