

A Broken Vow;

—OR—

BETTER THAN REVENGE.

CHAPTER X.

"What are you doing here?" asked Olive breathlessly, as she faced the man across the narrow grave on which the stolen wreath was lying.

"My dear Olive," he responded coolly, "I think the question rather should be—what are you doing here? If we come to a matter of every-day fact, I have a right to be here because I am alive; you have no right at all, because, according to the newspapers, which never lie and never make mistakes, you are most unmistakably dead."

"I am supposed to be dead," she admitted reluctantly. "It sometimes becomes necessary, in this life of ours, that we should apparently drop out of things." Was my life so fine or so noble that I should not crave to begin again—to be something else?"

"Very interesting," said the man, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and looking at her curiously. "You were always a little odd, my sweet Olive; that was the real enchantment of you"—he removed a hand from his pocket for a moment and wafted an ironical kiss at her—"one never knew what to expect from you. Behold me; I hear suddenly that you have been abruptly and most unromantically killed: my heart is torn—my breast a desert; I spend the last money I have in the world to come and cast myself upon your grave. And you rise up before me—alive, and as handsome as ever. Wonderful Olive!"

"Why should you trouble me at all?" she asked quickly. "I have no very pleasant memories of you in the past; why not believe, or try to believe, that Olive Varney lies quietly there below us, and that you need not trouble about her any more. Why not let me put everything aside—lay it to rest here—and begin again."

"Because, my dear Olive, that is quite impossible. I have told you, on many occasions in your own lifetime and in that of your sainted father, that I love you; your obduracy in the past has been the only thing that has spoiled my life, in a manner of speaking. I met you abroad years ago, when I had grown a little tired of things, and you were fresh and sweet and comparatively new to life. You were a girl then, living under the dominion of a most unnatural father—"

"My father is dead," she reminded him sternly.

"That does not alter the circumstances; it is merely a relief for you and for me," he replied airily. "I loved you then, you were so uncommon—so surprising. There was about you some infinite capacity for love, which you, under the direction of your father, were only too willing to starve and stifle. I tried to draw that love out of you, and you turned upon me like a fury, which only made you more enchanting than ever. Of all the women I had met, my dear Olive, you were the one I could not read in the first moment; if it should ever be my dear delight to call you mine, and I had the extreme felicity to live to be a hundred and you a few years less, I should still know that with your latest breath you would surprise me. Adorable Olive,"—he seated himself on the grave and looked up at her with a whimsical smile—"who lies under here?"

"Victor Kelman," she said sternly—"I never loved you, and I never can. You were my father's friend, and I was forced against my will to see a great deal of you. I ask you now to go away and to leave me—to believe me dead and never to change that belief. So far as you are concerned, Victor, Olive Varney lies in that grave; she has nothing to do with you."

"My dear Olive," he replied, with a little laugh, "you fail to see the extraordinary advantage I have gained. For the first time in your life I have the better of you; for the first time I have discovered that you are committing a fraud, and with the instinct of a man I take advantage of it. I find you advertised as dead; I discover you living. I ask again, what is the move?"

"I had a purpose in being hidden," she replied doggedly. "It suited me that someone who expected to come face to face with Olive Varney should come face to face with a stranger instead. I was here when the accident took place; by a miracle I escaped, and another woman unconsciously took my place. Olive Varney is dead; I want you to remember that always."

"Olive Varney is dead—peace to her!" he exclaimed dramatically, removing his hat. "And I—Victor Kelman—her old friend, and the friend of her father—I have the satisfaction of meeting a certain sweet personage who resembles her wonderfully, and has all her most charming attributes. And as that sweet person and I must have much to say to each other concerning the dear departed, I propose that we begin to talk about her at once. For I can never forget that I loved her."

"And you show your love by robbing another grave to decorate hers," said Olive bitterly.

"My dear Unknown," said Victor Kel-

man, rising to his feet and replacing his hat—"when I explain my reasons, am sure that I shall be forgiven. Fortune has not been good to me; if you come to that, it never was. I come to the grave of the one woman I ever loved, and I find that she has no friend who could afford to place upon her last resting-place some slight memento. My blood boils at the thought; my empty pockets are a reproach to me. But near at hand I observe a grave on which a wreath has been placed.

I have no earthly interest in this other grave; probably there reposes within it a man or a woman with whom I should inevitably have quarrelled in life—an utterly unworthy individual. Shall my sweet Olive lie undecorated, and the worthless one have a wreath? Perish the thought; I change the wreath from the unworthy to the worthy—and all the gods and all the graces smile upon me for the act."

Olive Varney picked up the wreath, and walked with it to the other grave; gently deposited it there. Coming back she looked at Victor Kelman, who was sadly shaking his head at her.

"Now—since you have discovered me—tell me what you want," she said. "I have asked nothing in this life but to be let alone; but Fate has been too strong for me. I thought to lie hidden there"—she pointed at the grave as she spoke—"but a man of your stamp has no compunction about breaking in upon my decent obscurity there. I ask again—what do you want?"

"My dear Olive—I want you," he replied coolly. "In this world the weak and the strong—the timid and the courageous—the helpless and the forceful—all drift naturally together. I am weak—timid—helpless; you are all the other things. More than that, you are unlike any other woman I ever met.

I liked you and admired you as a girl. I loved you as a woman; I wept bitter tears when I heard that you had departed for another world to which I could not, except by violent means, be permitted to follow you. I visited your grave; an elderly and very obtuse sexton, who is also various other romantic things in the parish, pointed it out to me, and gave me a full account of the accident. But it seems, my dear Olive, that he was misinformed, and that some other Olive Varney lies here. But, of course, the last word is with you."

She hesitated for a moment or two. The situation was so entirely strange to be thus standing beside her own grave, and yet to have to give an explanation of her own appearance in bodily form to this man, who had mourned her as dead. The difficulty was increased by the fact of that one-sided love-story to which he referred; she saw that for the first time in her life she had given him a power over her, and she resented it bitterly.

"There was no particular object in my declaring who I was, or in my clinging to the name of Olive Varney," she said at last, evasively. "An accident pinned that name, as it were, to a dead woman—a woman who died in the train in the place I had been in but a moment before. She happened to have caught up a bag that was mine; there was no clue to claim her, and so they put down the name in the bag as hers. It did not matter to me, and I did not contradict it. There you have the whole story, Victor Kelman."

He shook his head and smiled, scratched his chin, and looked at her through half-closed eyes. "My dear Olive—you are not so completely honest with me as I could have hoped," he said. "If there is one thing in this world we cling to more than another, it is our identity; with many of us it is the only thing we are able to carry beyond the grave. Yet you willingly give up that to an unknown woman, allow her to take what is yours while you walk out into the world with no name at all. My dear—it really will not wash."

"What do you suspect?" she asked.

"I suspect nothing; but I scent a romance—broken vows—a lover who has deceived a trusting heart, and who must be pursued in secret. All very beautiful, my charmer—but where do you come in?"

"You are entirely wrong. I have no lover, unless you call yourself one," she added contemptuously. "I admit that I had a purpose in dropping out of life, as it were; but that purpose does not concern you. You have by the merest chance discovered my secret; keep it, and I shall be grateful. So far as you are concerned, Olive Varney lies there,"—she pointed to the mound between them—"and you're done with her. You have spoken to a stranger, and the stranger wishes you 'Good-bye.'"

She turned and walked swiftly away, but the man came striding after her. When they faced each other again in the deserted graveyard there was a look of determination on both faces, Kelman was the first to speak.

"I shan't let you go like that," he said, with a new sternness in his voice. "You don't seem to understand the po-

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