

A Broken Vow;

—OR—

BETTER THAN REVENGE.

CHAPTER XVI.

That spirit of mischief which had always animated Mr. Victor Kelman prompted him now to throw himself into the very heart of the business, and bring down with a crash whatever houses of cards had been built. At the time when he had first come into the matter so accidentally, he had made one discovery of importance; that was that Olive Verney had adopted the identity of a certain Aunt Phipps, whom she had discovered was expected to visit No. 3 Greenway's Gardens. The mystery had always been, of course, as to how she had become possessed of that information, and where and why the real Aunt Phipps was hiding.

Now, in a sense, that mystery was solved—or at all events the key to it was in Mr. Victor Kelman's hands, in the shape of that slip of paper bearing the address of Aunt Phipps in Westminster. Holding that sudden power, Mr. Victor Kelman dalled with it, in a way, and was in no hurry to use it.

For of course he had first of all to consider what the consequences would be. Victor Kelman was never openly vindictive—life was too short, and too pleasant; he was only occasionally bitter and envious of people who had the good things of life, when he had not. And he was particularly bitter and envious concerning young Christopher Dayne. For had not Christopher been for some time past in the enjoyment of money which had once, for a fleeting hour or so, been in Victor's possession?—and was not Victor reduced to a mere matter of a sovereign or so, whilst this for a mere woman's whim, had the bulk of the money. And here, in this slip of paper he held in his hand, was the fine strong lever, which could overthrow that house of cards, to begin with.

Again, as to Lucy. He had no active feeling in regard to the girl; he was simply annoyed with her, in a curious way, because she had given her heart to Chris—Chris, who was a mere boy, with no experience of the world, and nothing about him—at least in the eyes of Mr. Victor Kelman—in any way attractive. Such a stupid sort of love-story certainly should, if possible, be upset. It had been upset already, but might be patched up again; if the boy were suddenly brought to ruin, there would be no probability of his doing anything but despairing decently altogether.

Lastly, but most importantly—as to Olive Verney. She had instructed him to do this thing, and he would in that way be pleasing her; would he, however, be serving his own case? To do the man credit, he had for Olive probably the strongest feeling he was capable of having for anyone; and he had a very deep admiration for her. Being himself a weak and somewhat less character, he recognized the strength and the firmness she displayed always; he had seen her, with those calm, brave eyes of hers, go through many years of hard and cheerless life as the companion of a man whose creed was a dark and horrible one; yet he was enough a man of the world and a judge of character to know that, in all that time, the woman in her had never been submerged. Hard as she appeared and sternly as she ordered her life, there was always, just beneath the surface, as it were, that touch of gentleness and of true womanliness that redeemed her. And it was that he loved in her, while he admired the strength.

She had gone, telling him that she would not return, and that she had done with that particular matter in which he had discovered her; his instinct told him that she would return. That was where the tenderness in her nature would assert its sway; she would want to know, above all things, what had happened, and what had been the effect of the coming of the real Aunt Phipps, and of the news of which she must be the bearer.

"She'll come back again—even if she does it secretly," he thought to himself, with a chuckle—"and the only person from whom she can glean full information is her beloved Victor. That is reasonable enough; I am her emissary—her messenger; she must come to me for my report. It is really curious how much fun the best-intentioned people in the world throw in one's way. I already see myself bringing the real Aunt Phipps here; I already observe the uncertainty of our dear young friend Chris when he discovers that he has been living on money provided by an utter stranger, and that he has a payer for an aunt, after all. How very, it requires thinking about; I'll wait a day."

He waited a day; and the more he thought about the scheme the better he liked it. Above all things, the mischief-making of the man was not his vanity, but in that he saw himself as the chief actor in a very pretty little comedy.

"I don't like you, Mr. Christopher Dayne," he said, with a jerk of the head in the direction in which an imaginary Christopher Dayne might be, "and I should like to see your proud head brought down a little. More than that, you have the money which should have been mine; I'm not sure that I mightn't be able to make you disgorge. Good

idea, that; I must see what we can make the real Aunt Phipps do." Behold him, then, taking his jaunty way towards Westminster; diving down into the dim narrow street; and presently discovering the shop of Tagg the clockmaker.

Having watched the house for a little time, and having pretty well made up his mind what he should do, he swung himself in through the little door into the shop, and confronted Jordan Tagg, busy as ever among his clock.

"What a deuce of a row!" ejaculated Mr. Victor Kelman, looking all about him with a frown. My enchanting Father Time, when you have quite ripened that wheel into its place, might give me a moment. With a long beard of yours, you only want a cheap scythe and an hour-glass, you'd look the picture to the life. Please wake up, Father Time, and let us hear from you how the world wags in your establishment. I believe the old fossil is deaf as the proverbial post," he said, still in an undertone.

Jordan Tagg looked up at him quite "I am not deaf, sir," he said, "and have been called Father Time before day, though in not quite so abrupt fashion. What can I do for you? you want a clock?"

"Time is of so little importance to me, my friend, that a clock would be of much use," said Victor, seat himself on the low counter, after brushing aside a clock or two to his way. "I have come on a much more agreeable errand; I have come to see certain Mrs. Phipps."

"What do you want with her?" asked the old man, looking at him suspiciously.

"Fie—fie!" exclaimed Victor, shaking his head at him. "Shall I tell a lady business? Perish the thought; let me breathe it to the lady herself. To be so earthy, my friend, I am interested in Mrs. Phipps; I bring a message for her. Does she have many visitors, may I ask?"

"Never but one," said Tagg slowly. "And that one a woman—tall, dark and handsome; with eyes that shine through you, and a voice that is kind and rather pleasant—eh?" asked Victor quickly. "You see I know all about it, in fact, I come from that one visitor, want you to tell me something about her?—I mean about Mrs. Phipps."

"I know nothing of her," said Tagg. "She never goes out; she keeps her room, I hear her walking about at night sometimes, and talking to herself. But, mind you,—Tagg leaned suddenly forward across his counter, and dropped a thin hand on Victor's shoulder—"like certain clocks I have had to deal with; may stop suddenly for no reason. They run down—these clocks—and never go again. Do you follow me?"

"My dear Father Time, we all run down at some time or other, and it is not always possible to wind us up again—or not always worth while. If you will indicate the room in which I shall find the charming lady who is in danger of running down, I shall be glad. I shan't hurt her, and I may take her cheering news. This way? Thank you; I will announce myself."

Mr. Victor Kelman went jauntily up the stairs, humming a little to himself, and quite pleased with his errand. The man always desired, above all things, to be interested; and he had been very deeply interested lately. He had touched matters of life and death and fortune and ruin; and he liked it. At the moment he was simply wondering what sort of being this Aunt Phipps was, who could so willingly consent to be kept out of the way as she had done.

He knocked sharply at the door, and listened. There was the sound of a chair being moved, and then a footstep within the room; then the door was opened. Looking in with his habitual smile, and his hat in his hand, Victor Kelman saw a little thin, faded old woman, who seemed a little afraid, and yet in the midst of her fear, to be rather glad to find a visitor at her door. Victor advanced a step—bowed with his best manner—and addressed her.

"Mrs. Phipps? Don't be startled; I'm a friend. May I come in?"

"If you will, sir," said Aunt Phipps. "I don't have many visitors, and it's a poor sort of room—not the sort of place that Phipps would ever have liked me to be discovered in, I can assure you. Why, when we were in Paris—"

"My dear lady," exclaimed Victor, stopping in the middle of the room, and looking all about with an air of the deepest admiration—"I really must protest. There is a poem somewhere on the subject—tealing with home, and having something to do with a work-basket; but I forget the words. A poor sort of room, Mrs. Phipps? Fie—fie! I look about me, and I see evidences of a woman and a woman's tastes—he kissed his fingers towards the evidences, and smiled more than ever—"and there are about the room and about you these indefinable little—fiddles—I am at a loss for a word, but there they are. As for the aspect—he walked to the window and looked out—"there may be a chimney-pot or two that could be dispensed with—but it might be wise. In a word, my dear Mrs. Phipps—a charming

ing room—and—he bowed again, and smiled again—"a charming lady."

"Ah, sir, you should have seen it—not this room, but those I've been used to, I mean—when poor Phipps walked the earth," said Aunt Phipps, searching in her pocket for the black-bordered handkerchief, with the full knowledge that she must need it very soon—"and when we used to have wine as quite an ordinary thing, and never thought of going anywhere without a carriage. Quite a royal way he had with him, poor Phipps; and I expect that he died in much the same manner, if the truth were known. I tremble to think, sir,—the black-bordered handkerchief was very much in evidence—"I tremble to think that he may have used firearms; he liked everything loud, even to his clothes."

The poor old woman had at some long-forgotten time been naturally of such a cheerful temperament that she was glad now, when this smiling, affable man came before her, to pour out something of the pent-up woe that was in her heart; glad, after sitting in that long waiting and

of Canada

Annual General Meeting
at the Banking House
Toronto, on Wednesday,
May, 1908.

of the Imperial Bank of Canada
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D. R. WILKIE, President.

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