

# A Broken Vow

—OR—

## BETTER THAN REVENGE.

### CHAPTER XIV.

In some fashion or other they had got into the little front room of No. 3 Greenways' Gardens, with Odley to swell the party, and they were all talking at once—all, that is, save Olive Varney. For her part she waited calmly and grimly while the talking went on, and wondered perhaps what they would have thought had they known the truth. Acting always on impulse, as she felt she must do at this time, she had done this thing suddenly, for a variety of reasons; only now, when it was finished, did she see the tremendous consequences which must ensue—only now did she understand what she had pledged herself to. As she stood there, listening in a dull fashion to all that was said, she remembered that one fact—that she had given the boy a hundred pounds, and that she had promised him a fortune.

She remembered all the events of the evening clearly. First, the certainty in her own mind that Victor Kelman had in some mysterious fashion secured the bag and the money; secondly, the desperate resolve to get her property back again. After that, a long period of watching and waiting, until at last she had seen him stroll jauntily down Greenways' Gardens. Her chance had come; she remembered with what trembling haste she had gone to the house where he lodged; how she had given a smiling, plausible excuse to his landlady and had been permitted to go to his room. And there—flaunting before her on a table in the very centre of the room—was the bag.

She had longed for money, lain awake nights scheming how to get it; she knew herself to be indebted to Christopher Dayne, and even to Lucy; debts which must be paid without delay. Her money was in her hands again; with that to strengthen her she could carry out what she had determined upon. The rest had been a mere matter of impulse; she had raced down Greenways' Gardens intent on getting to her room, and had been met at the door of No. 3 by the party returning from Martin Blake's studio. The money was in her hands, and she had every right to it; but she realized in a moment that she had stolen it from Victor Kelman, and that, in the eyes of everyone, she was not Olive Varney, to whom it belonged, but Aunt Phipps. There was a double impulse in the matter; to get rid of the money on the instant, in order to cheat Victor Kelman, and to suddenly enrich Christopher Dayne—not with a mere payment that should settle her debt to him, but with something substantial that should lift him, as it were, in a moment out of the little world of Greenways' Gardens.

For Olive Varney had recognized in a double sense that the boy was in the way. She had seen each growing phase of the love-story; had recognized that no mere matter of vengeance such as she planned could ever touch that romance, or spoil it. More than that, Christopher stood between Lucy Ewing and any harm that might come to her; no matter how poor he was, or how apparently helpless, he was still young and strong and full of hope. No disaster could touch the girl while he defended her; therefore he must be got rid of.

Olive Varney had been trained in a hard school—a school which laughed at love and tenderness, and saw the world only as a bitter place in which one must live until death brought release. One thing had been worshipped, and one only—money. That was a loom, because it made life easy and possible. But she had seen that it hardened men and spoiled women; it was the only weapon she knew how to use, and on the impulse of that moment she had used it. This poor fool of a boy with his romantic dreams, was to be made apparently suddenly rich, as he had long ago expected to be. Obviously he would no longer pay any attention to such a person as Lucy Ewing, who lived in a lodging-house, and was poor and friendless. The thing was clear; this sudden apparent accession to wealth would make a vast difference to the stupid love-story. He would go way, out into the world that invited him and his fortune to make the best of it, and would forget the girl.

Prudence alone demanded that she should, while giving him a generous sum, keep something substantial for her own needs. So it happened that she gave him that hundred pounds; so it happened that she stood now, looking on a little contemptuously while he fingered the notes and talked of his good fortune. "But why did you do it, Aunt Phipps?" she heard Christopher saying at last. "Why make me believe that all the money had been lost and that you were poor also? It wasn't fair, Aunt Phipps."

"Fair enough," she retorted. "I wanted to try you—to show you what disappointment meant—before you got what was yours." She spoke bitterly, thinking perhaps of herself at that moment. "Now go out into the world—spend your money—and get all the enjoyment a young man craves. This is no place for you, Chris; you are rich, and you must see the world."

"We can think about that afterwards," said Chris slowly, his eyes on Lucy. "My world just now lies here; I ask for

nothing better. You, Aunt Phipps, given me the means—that is all wonderful to think that to-night and I had made up our minds to would face all the terrors that might hold for us without a penny help us; now we face the world with the terrors gone from it. It does make any difference—except that makes matters easier."

He slipped a hand under Lucy's and whispered to her; she smiled shyly at him. Olive Varney took quickly and went out of the room.

"I hope I haven't offended her," Chris, in some surprise. "I feel sorry that I scarcely know what to say to anyone—except to you, dear," he said, in a whisper.

"In the old days," murmured plaintively, "there was one of the that said things to me—man with a complexion, and a heart of the sun or—who was coming into a room every time I gave him his bill. I impatient at last about it, and went to look for it—and never came back all the things he'd said to me, to

Olive Varney had gone to her. She had played the big card, and as she could see at the moment lost. So far from spoiling that romance she had but hastened its completion. Every she told herself that for the first time she had, in some perverse fashion, brought the lovers more together. The first, because she had cleared the boy's dreams to be used and so had roused the girl's pity for him; the second, by putting in hands that which gave him a practical assurance of the certainty of his future. Olive Varney had failed in every particular.

All night long in uneasy dream seemed as though the shadow of stern father who had dominated childhood hovered over her—a stern presence, reminding her of her father. All night long through her dreams sang the burden of that vow she learned so long ago, and had tried to hold so sternly before her. What she thought bitterly of the obvious that she, who had crept into the room to wreck the life of this young girl, the one being sleeping under that when who had done most to bring happiness to Lucy Ewing. If anyone had remembered in the prayers of the No. 3 Greenways' Gardens, that night it was surely Aunt Phipps.

She came down late to breakfast, had no desire to meet Chris or anyone else until she had had time to formulate some plan in her mind. Odley called upon her, and waited with a sense of the superiority of Aunt Phipps, people who could, like conjurers, produce bundles of notes at a moment's notice were certainly to be respected. Odley's ideas of humanity had formed from people who never produced money at all if they could possibly avoid it. She even went so far as to suggest the procuring of some rare delicacy from some shop in the neighborhood; Aunt Phipps was a person to be pampered.

Olive, however, declined everything, including what was already on the table. She was sitting, moodily enough, at her untasted breakfast when Odley announced a visitor, and, stepping into the hall, allowed that visitor to enter. It was Mr. Victor Kelman; and he came blandly and smilingly as ever. He stood until the door was closed behind him, and then his remark characteristic.

"Naughty—naughty!" he exclaimed, wagging a finger at her playfully. "It was about in the dark until its friend back was turned, and then creep up the wicked woman in the play, and steal its bank notes? I wonder, when he went on, dropping into a chair, changing his tone, "I really wonder the device you found out I got it."

"Never mind that; it was one too many for you. You should know Olive Varney well enough by this time to know that anyone of your capacity is scarcely likely to let her. You, my friend, suddenly acted as a traitor; you saved me a journey into the country, and you kindly secured my property for me."

"Suppose I say that Aunt Phipps stole my money?"

"You won't do that, because it wouldn't be believed," she retorted. "Besides—suppose I come to it, and proved that you, by false representations had stolen what was mine—eh?"

"Well, cry quits," said Victor, with a laugh. "But, my dear—why give it to the boy?"

"Because I was a fool," she explained bitterly. "Because I thought that I might drive the two of them apart—lovers, I mean. I thought I might pretend that the boy was rich—drive him on into extravagance—ruin him, if not be. I can only touch her through him—and I've failed again."

"Oh, you women—why will you be impulsive?" exclaimed Victor, with a sigh. "One hundred of the best good and nothing to show for it. He'll be about in calms, and he'll have a dinner or two—and he'll ask for more; that about all that will happen, if I know anything of young men. Why didn't you consult me?"

"You were not to be trusted; you had simply secured the money for yourself."

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