

LOVE CONQUERS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DORA THORNE," "A ROSE IN THORNS," ETC.

"You will be a gentleman when you come back, Vane," said Kate. "Do not forget us," cried his mother, and there was a ring of passionate pain in her voice. "Come back to us my darling, as good as true as you leave us."

"You must make your own way now, my boy," said the farmer. "I shall see of what metal you are made when we meet again."

There was a mist as of blinding rain before Vane's eyes as the old homestead disappeared from his gaze, and he turned his face to the new world which awaited him.

CHAPTER IV.

"Welcome to Lutworth!" said Sir Raye Vibart. "I hope you will make your home here for many happy years." The words were kind, and the boy's heart warmed to the speaker. One warm sunny evening in July the travelers had reached home. No surprise was expressed in Sir Raye's household when he brought home with him a youth who seemed to take the place of an adopted son. Sir Raye never did the same to any other people. He was a genius; therefore it was impossible for him to marry and be happy, or to have a son; he must, just because he was a genius, love unhappily, and adopt some one else's child.

Lutworth was a revelation to Vane. He had never dreamed of such a place. It was a magnificent old country mansion with oaken floors, oriel windows, corridors as large as rooms, stately towers, ivy-clad turrets, and grand terraces that sloped down to gardens filled with flowers. It was a mansion with an old-fashioned charm about it, yet furnished with modern luxury; and this superb abode was henceforward to be the abode of the boy who had nothing to distinguish him save genius.

No wonder that he was a little dazzled by his good fortune, and considered it a grand thing to be a genius.

Sir Raye was delighted with his protégé. The boy was soon quite at home in the midst of his luxurious surroundings; by no word or gesture did he betray himself; he was quick and keen, and he waited always to see first what Sir Raye did at table, then he imitated him. Before a week had passed, Vane knew as much of table etiquette as though he had lived at Lutworth all his life; the consequence was that in no way did his behavior jar upon Sir Raye, who was one of the most fastidious of men.

The pleasant rooms were set apart for Vane's use, and the privilege he valued most, a place in Sir Raye's study, was given to him. He was a wonderful genius, as no person had before; he had already, in his studies at home, mastered many of the rudiments of knowledge. After a few lessons and a little patient teaching from Sir Raye he became of the greatest assistance to his master. It pleased Sir Raye to see the thoughtful head bent over papers, and designs of all kinds—Vane was so much like himself, so silent at his work, so absorbed in it, never interrupting it by an idle or careless word.

"You are more like a hermit at his devotion than a student at his lessons," said Sir Raye to him one day.

After a time he began to take keen delight in the work of his protégé.

"Give me your notion, Vane, of a bridge that should span a river, with hills on either bank," or show me something original in the shape of a pier that is to run half a mile out to sea." And then with proud delight he would examine his pupil's sketch.

"You will be more clever some day, Vane, than I have ever been," he said to him one morning.

"Building over everything to you, sir," was the grateful reply.

The year following, when the pressure of business had in some measure abated, Sir Raye resolved to take his protégé for a Continental tour. Nothing, he was of opinion, would excite him more quickly. He would let him see some of the greatest bridges of the world, bridges that had been built in spite of almost insurmountable difficulties—let him see the triumphs of science, and how men could bring the very elements under control. The greater part of a year was spent in traveling about, and they saw nearly every engineering work of magnitude.

When Vane returned with his patron to Lutworth, he was only nineteen years of age, but he was a man. A fair moustache shaded the sensitive mouth, the cluster of fair hair gleamed in color, the tall slender figure had in it the grace and strength of manhood, and his manners were perfect. He was grave, kindly, and courteous, deferential to all women, pleasant to all men. Although only nineteen, the world had begun to talk about him. He had taken a great interest in connecting England and France by means of a tunnel under the sea; he had pondered it, studied it, and devised skill and genius on it; and one morning the scientific world was taken by surprise, for a pamphlet appeared entitled "The Best and Safest Way to France Under the Sea." That little brochure made a great name for Vane. He had asked who had written it, and the answer was, "Young Vibart." No one mentioned that he was only an adopted son of Sir Raye, and the world in general, careless enough, never stopped to inquire; so it was the general impression as to the rising genius of the young Vibart.

He was the son of the famous Sir Raye, of the thousands who read his book, not more than twenty knew that he was not the real son of the master of Lutworth.

"Your way in life lies straight before you, Vane," said his patron; "it will be a quick march on to victory. You could do without me now, but could never again live without you—without my adopted son—never again."

When flattering notices and honors were lavished upon Vane, Sir Raye gave him one more piece of advice.

"The world is ready enough to flatter you, and to welcome you with open arms. Fight off of it for a time; keep to study and work. You will have invitations here and there, first to one great house, and then to another; refuse them one and all. The proper time in which a man should work is youth; rest and age should come together."

During all this time Vane had been home twice—once before he went abroad, and once after his return. Everything was unchanged; it seemed almost incredible that the homely farmer, with his rugged face, brown hands and working clothes, should be the father of the handsome distinguished-looking man whose face was stamped with genius. It seemed incongruous, and father and son both felt it to be so; and there was a strange awkwardness and coldness between them.

The mother's heart broke down all barriers. Let her son be twenty times a gentleman, still he was her son, and she should love him just as she did when he was a child. There was no awkwardness, no restraint with her; she admired him, and told him so. She thought him the most handsome, the most distinguished, the greatest genius in the whole world. To her wondering eyes there was no one like him. She had nothing but the warmest

love and the most profound admiration for him.

Vane found his sister growing into one of the most beautiful girls imaginable. Deirdre was as usual.

The young man had not gone home empty-handed. He had spent much money in presents. Not one member of the family was forgotten; and his gifts were not only numerous, but costly, and they made quite a gay place of the old farmhouse. His mother never tired of showing these treasures to her friends and acquaintances, and praising the good heart of her wonderful son.

So his visit home came and passed with the swiftness of a meteor, leaving nothing but bright and pleasant memories behind. The second visit was paid when he returned from the Continent; and then the distance between father and son had grown so great that nothing could bridge it over. The old farmer seemed to stand somewhat in awe of his handsome talented son, whose hands were white and smooth, whose voice had musical inflections, unlike any other he had ever heard, and whose face had a light he could not comprehend. The mother was as usual, all admiration and love. The sister, rapidly growing into a beauty, looked forward to great help from her brother. But that visit made the distance between Vane and his relatives greater than ever, and, as time rolled on, a cloud hid his old home from his view, until nothing but the memory of it remained.

There was one duty he never forgot—to help his people in all their needs. No quarter passed without his sending such a check as gladdened their anxious hearts, and that check increased in proportion as his studies and labors progressed.

CHAPTER V.

Ten years had passed since Sir Raye Vibart had adopted the boy who was to be his son. He had seemed to him too great to waste in solitude; and he often said to himself that Heaven had rewarded him for what he intended to be a good deed. All over Europe the name of Vane Vibart was well known. There was no country in which some of his gigantic enterprises had not succeeded. Of late years all the work had fallen into his hands. Sir Raye was failing in health, and was paying the penalty of too much brain-work. By degrees he put everything into the hands of his young protégé.

They were together one morning in the pretty breakfast-room at Lutworth Hall, when the post-bag was brought in.

"Read the letters, Vane," said Sir Raye. He knew that in none of them would there be any secrets. The love of woman or child would never be had and never be for him.

"Read them, Vane," he repeated.

"Vane obeyed him. He read through a mass of correspondence—letters in German, French, and Spanish. He spent his leisure hours in the study of the modern languages, and had succeeded so well that he could write and converse in most of them.

"A letter with a coronet," he said.

"Whom can this be from?"

He opened it, and read it, all unconscious that he held his fate in his own hands.

"Lord Audley of Ulverscroft," he said.

"Why, Ulverscroft is in Surrey, Sir Raye, is it not?"

"Yes. What does he want?" asked Sir Raye.

"The river Ulver runs through one part of his estate. It was not always a deep or a broad stream; but of late it has deepened and widened considerably. He says that the people need stopping-places, and at times a small ferry-boat for crossing it; but now those methods are not available. He thinks it would add much to the value of his property if a light, pretty, ornamental bridge were thrown across the river. He writes that, owing to the shifting sand in the bed of the river, he thinks it will be by no means easy of execution. He wishes you to go to Ulverscroft Hall and spend a week with him. Then you can see for yourself what is best."

"I am not well enough to go, Vane. My strength is failing. You must go for me. Write to Lord Audley, and tell him how deeply I regret that I cannot accept his kind invitation, but that I send a substitute in you."

"Will he like it?" asked Vane half doubtfully. "He seems to wish for you."

"He must like it. I have a certain presentiment that my working days are ended," said Sir Raye mournfully. "Vane, Lord Audley will be delighted to have you in his place. Write to him at once. You will enjoy a week at Ulverscroft. It is one of the prettiest places in England. I always regret that some time or other there must be a bridge over the Ulver. It is a beautiful river, and the bridge must be a light one."

Vane sat down, pencil in hand, to sketch a light beautiful structure that should yet have solidity enough to bear a whole regiment. It was interesting to watch the rapidity of his white fingers, the glow on his face, and the light in his eyes as his beautiful conception grew. He took his sketch to his master when it was completed, and almost wondered at the emotion in his face.

"You remind me of Quentin Matsys," said Sir Raye with a smile.

But his pupil shrunk from his words. He liked nothing that reminded him of his origin. He had mixed in the highest society and had been treated as an equal by the noblest in the land. He could not endure to remember what his name and its surroundings were. It was a rank with sensitive horror from having been known.

"To compare him to 'Quentin Matsys' was to remind him that his origin was humble and obscure. Yet, like the true artist he was, he rejoiced in his master's praise of the beautiful conception that had grown out of his hands."

"Lord Audley will be delighted with your idea. He is a man of great taste," said Sir Raye; and, without ceremony, Vane, I have seen nothing so beautiful as this bridge."

So the letter was written and duly received by Lord Audley, and by him the like everything else, in the hands of his daughter, the Lady Lillias.

"Read this, Lillias," he said. "I am not quite pleased. You see that Sir Raye Vibart cannot come himself, he is ill and ailing, but he sends his adopted son and partner, Vane Vibart, who he assures me will give me greater satisfaction than he himself could do."

"This is the young Vibart who wrote about the Channel tunnel. Everyone was talking about him last year."

"I remember," said the Earl. "Ah, well, I shall be pleased indeed to see him! He proposes coming next Tuesday. I suppose, Lillias, we can receive him then?"

"Colonel Gordon and Lady Frances will be here; but that will not matter," replied Lady Lillias. "Sir Vibart will be your guest, papa, not mine."

"Certainly, my dear, certainly," said the Earl heartily. "He stood greatly in awe of his daughter, who was considered one of the greatest girls in England. 'You see Mr. Vibart really is a gentleman. He must, while he is in the house with us, associate with us. He would be received anywhere.'"

"It is a leveling age, papa; but certainly make Mr. Vibart welcome and comfortable."

"Now Lillias," said the Earl pleadingly, "do not, pray do not."

"What papa?" she interrupted. "Do not my dear, speak in that tone. I know just what it means. You will receive that unfortunate young man in your most kindly freezing fashion, and at the end of an hour he will wish himself a thousand miles away. I know your manner well with people of that kind."

"It is an unfortunate if my manner does not please you, papa," said Lady Lillias proudly.

"It does, my dear," cried the Earl heartily. "It does very much indeed; but I feel sorry at times for those who do not quite—understand it—as I do; do you see, my love? You will do your best for Mr. Vibart. I am sure you are one of the desires of my heart to see a bridge over the Ulver. I was in some measure compelled to ask Sir Raye to pay me a visit; so that the bridge should be an ornament to the estate of the sweetest of women; at the same time I honestly believe you to be the proudest girl in England. Now do not be offended?"

"I am not sure but that I am flattered," she answered; and Lord Audley, knowing the heart of his daughter, gave her his beautiful young daughter, went away.

"The proudest girl in England," men and women both gave that title to the heiress of Ulverscroft. Yet, strange to say, her pride made her no enemies; it seemed natural to her, and was the becoming shield to her rare loveliness. When her violet eyes looked calmly over or at any persons whom she did not intend to recognise, the impression left upon them was less of pride than of their own unworthiness.

She was just nineteen, and for two years she had been the queen of the great world of fashion, a queen such as had seldom reigned before—so young so marvelously fair, so proud, so pure, so utterly unspoiled by the homage that was enough to make other women vain. Princess bowed before her and sought her smiles; she gave them no favor. Peers sought her society; but not one could boast that the exquisite face had ever brightened or softened for him. All homage, flattery, and compliment seemed to fall from her and leave her untouched. She was faultlessly beautiful, with a fair patrician bearing, and a wealthy heiress, and the daughter of one of England's most honored peers. She was the worshiped queen of the great world, holding proud sovereignty. Weekly journals did not hold out her portrait as an inducement to purchasers. Her photographs were not to be seen in any shop window in London. Her reign was of a higher order. 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