

# THE VICAR'S GOVERNNESS

CHAPTER XXIV.—Continued.

But Dorian's heart did not seem to be in it. "Am I to understand by your silence that you fear to pain me?" he says, at length, in a low voice. "Is it impossible to you to love me? Well, do not speak. I can see by your face that the hope I have been cherishing for so many weeks has been a vain one. Forgive me for troubling you; and believe I shall never forget how tenderly you shrank from telling me you could never return my love."

Again he presses her hand to his lips; and she, turning her face slowly to his, looks up at him. Her late tears were but a summer shower, and have faded away, leaving no traces as they passed.

"But I didn't mean one word of all that," she says, naively, letting her long lashes fall once more over her eyes. "Then what did you mean?" demands he, with some pardonable impatience. "Quite the contrary, all through!"

"Not quite," with hesitation.

"At least, that with that you will be my wife?"

"Not altogether."

"Well, you can't be half my wife," says Mr. Branscombe, promptly. "Darling, darling, put me out of my misery, and say what I want you to say."

"Well, then, yes." She gives the promise softly, shyly, but without the faintest touch of any deeper, tender emotion. Had Dorian been one degree less in love with her, he could have hardly failed to notice this fact. As it is, he is radiant in a very seventh heaven of content.

"That you must promise me faithfully never to be unkind to me again," says George, impressively, laying a finger on his lips.

"Unkind?"

"Yes, dreadfully unkind; just think of all the terrible things you said, and the way you said them. Your eyes were as big as half-crowns, and you looked exactly as if you would like to eat me. Do you know, you reminded me of Aunt Elizabeth!"

"Oh, George!" says Branscombe, reproachfully. He has grown rather intimate with Aunt Elizabeth and her in-laws by this time, and fully understands that to be compared with her hardly tends to raise him in his beloved's estimation.

"There is silence between them after this, that lasts a full minute—a long time for lovers freshly made."

"What are you thinking of?" asks Dorian, presently, bending to look tenderly into her downcast eyes. Perhaps he is hoping eagerly that she has been wasting a thought upon him.

"I shall never have to teach those horrid lessons again," she says, with a quick sigh of relief.

If he is disappointed, he carefully conceals it. He laughs, and lifting her exquisite face, kisses her on the forehead.

"Never," he says, emphatically. "When you go home, tell Mr. Redmond all about it; and to-morrow, Clarissa has to go down to the vicarage and bring you up to Governor, where you must stay until we are married."

"What a sweet smile," says George, with a sweet smile. "But Mr. Branscombe—"

"Who on earth is Mr. Branscombe?" asked Dorian. "Don't you know my name yet?"

"Do, I think it is almost the prettiest name I ever heard of—Dorian." "Darling! I never thought of a nice name before; but now that you have called me by it, I can't help thinking of it. But I dare say I had been christened Jehoshaphat I should, under these circumstances, think it just the same. Well, you were going to say—"

"Perhaps Clarissa will not care to have me for a son-in-law?"

"So long! How long! By the bye, perhaps she wouldn't; so I suppose we had better be married as soon as ever we can."

"I haven't got any clothes," says Miss Broughton; at which they both laugh gaily, as though it were the merriest jest in the world.

"You terrify me," says Branscombe. "Let me beg you will rectify such a mistake as soon as you can."

"We have been here a long time," says George, suddenly, glancing at the sun, that is almost hidden out of sight behind the solemn firs.

"It hasn't been ten minutes," says Mr. Branscombe, conviction making his tone brilliant.

"Oh, nonsense!" says George. "I am sure it must be quite two hours since you came."

As it has been barely one, it is rather difficult to endure with equanimity.

"How long you have found it!" he says, with some regret. He is honestly pained, and his eyes grow darker. Looking at her, he sees that she has done, and, though ignorant of the very meaning of the word "love," knows that she has hurt him more than he cares to confess.

"I have been happy—quite happy," she says, sweetly, coloring warmly as she says it. "I cannot say I have found the time you have been with me dull or dreary. Only, I am afraid Clarissa will miss me."

"I should think anyone would miss you," says Dorian impulsively. He smiles at her as she speaks; but there is a curious mingling of sadness and longing and uncertainty in his face. Laying one arm around her, with his other hand he draws her head down upon his breast.

"At least, before we go, you will kiss me once," she says, entreatingly. All the gaiety—the gladness—the gladness from his voice; only the deep and lasting love remains. He says this, too, hesitatingly, as though he half afraid to depend so great a boon.

"Yes; I think I should like to kiss you," says George, kindly; and then she leans towards him, and, standing on tiptoe, places both hands upon his shoulders, and with the utmost earnestness, kisses him on the lips.

"Do you know," she says, a moment later, in no wise disconcerted because of the warmth of the caress he has given her in exchange for hers— "you know, I never remember kissing any one in all my life before, except poor papa, and Clarissa, and your presence."

Even at this avowal she does not blush. Were he her brother, or an aged uncle, she could scarcely think less about the favor she has just conferred upon the man who is standing silently regarding her, puzzled and disappointed truly, but earnestly registering a vow that sooner or later, if faithful love can accomplish it, he will make her all his own. In a heart and a soul, and gone down into the matter as to tell himself the love is all on his own side. Instinctively he shrinks from such a confession. It is only when he has parted from her, and is riding quietly homeward through the twilight, that he glances back, remembers, with a pang, how, of all the thousand and one things asked and answered, one alone has been forgotten—he has never desired of her whether she loves him.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Love set me up on high; when I grew vain Of that my height, love brought me down again."

"The heart of love is with a thousand woes Pierced, which secure indifference never knows."

"The rose eye wears the silent thorn at heart, And never 'yet might pain for love depart."

—Trench.

When Mrs. Redmond, next morning,

you, George, do you love me?"

"Love you? Yes, I suppose so; I don't know," with decided hesitation. "I am certain I like you very, very much. I am quite happy when with you, and you don't bore me a bit. Is that all?"

The definition of what love may be, hardly comes up to the mark in Mr. Branscombe's estimation. She has risen, and is now looking up at him inquiringly, with eyes earnest and beautiful and deep, but so cold. They tell him in a gray continuation of the "Arabian Nights' Entertainments." "When she recovers her breath, after the shock she took to her nervous system, she lays down the inevitable sock she is mending, and says as follows:

"Dear George, are you quite sure he meant it? Young men, nowadays, say so many things without exactly knowing what they mean especially after a dance, as I have been told."

"I am quite sure," says George, flushing hotly. "She has sufficient self-love to render this doubt very unpalatable."

Something that is not altogether remote from navy crews into Mrs. Redmond's heart. Being a mother, she can hardly help contrasting her Cissy's future with the brilliant one carved out for her governess. Presently, however, being a thoroughly good soul, she conquers these unworthy thoughts, and when next she speaks her tone is full of heartiness and honest congratulation. In fact, she is sincerely pleased. The fact that the future Lady Sartoris is at present an inmate of her house is a thought full of joy to her.

"You are so happy and a very fortunate girl," she says, gravely.

"Indeed yes, I think so," returns George, in a low tone, but with perfect calmness. There is none of the blushing happiness about her that should indicate that she is betrothed to the lover of her heart.

"Of course you do," says Mrs. Redmond, missing something in her words, and then she says, "And what are we to do without you, I can't conceive, no one to sing to us in the evening, and we have got so accustomed to that."

"I can still come and sing to you," says George, with tears in her eyes and voice.

"Ah, yes—sometimes. That is just the part of it when one has known an 'always,' one does not take kindly to a 'sometimes.' And now here comes all my governess troubles back upon me, and I am more than a little unselfish, my dear, to think of that just now in the very morning of your betrothal. I have been so content with you, it never occurred to me others might want you too."

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