

The Story of the Wedding Ring

By Bertha M. Clay. Continued from 14 page.

took from my mother's finger for me; I shall have them buried with me. The last letter but one said she was about to start from Chester, and would talk to the town of Ashburnham, where she would wait and rest for a few days.

The last letter of all came from Ashburnham, and was dated from there. Surely there was never a more pitiful petition presented; there was an appeal that would have touched the hardest heart, and Lord Carlwood covered his face with his hands as he listened. Katherine wrote from a sad stationer's shop, and the last penny she had in the world was to pay for the postage of the letter. She begged him, for her dear mother's sake, for the love of heaven, to send her a little money—to save her from starvation and death—'ever so little,' or she must take her child in her arms and lie down by the roadside again.

That was the last—there the tragedy ended. 'If you had received that letter,' asked Mr. Ford, 'would you have refused her help?' 'May heaven be merciful to me,' he said with a deep sigh, 'I believe that I should have done so.'

'What can have happened?' questioned Mr. Ford indignantly. 'She never wrote another letter. Did she die in Ashburnham, I wonder?' 'I would not say that,' Lord Carlwood's face grew white as with the pallor of death. 'She died,' he said, 'of starvation? Not even him at anything as terrible. For heaven's sake, send me the letter, if you can! Shall we go? I shall never rest again.'

'I will go to Ashburnham myself,' said Mr. Ford, 'I will lose no time. I will go at once; and the moment I discover anything, will send a telegram to you.'

'Lord Carlwood could hardly control his impatience. 'You think it better,' he said, 'that I should not go?' 'Decidedly,' replied Mr. Ford, 'I can see more quickly, more promptly, and more energetically than you do. He went that same day, and the result of his journey was more satisfactory than he had ventured to hope it would be. He took up his residence—not at the principal hotel—but in a little place to obtain such information as he sought at an old-fashioned inn; and at night, when he had invited the landlord to join him over a glass of wine, he cleverly turned the conversation on the subject of strange and sudden deaths.

'He had heard of the whole story—how a certain poor lady that had come to the town had died without telling her name, or saying to whom she belonged, or anything that could throw any light upon her history.'

'She really died in that strange way?' questioned Mr. Ford, breathlessly; and the landlord told him the story of the great interest at Ashburnham, 'yes—that was how she died.'

'And the child?' pursued the lawyer. 'What became of the child?' 'He could hardly bear the moments of suspense before the landlord answered him. 'The prettiest girl in the whole country side, I may say she called her. The lawyer started as the familiar name fell upon his ear. 'Immy,' he repeated—'that is a strange name.'

some, strong, with a fine face and a manly figure—industrious, and very clever, they say, at all kinds of mechanical work. His hands are iron. He is a complete radical in politics, believing in the rights of the workman, and is frequent after a grand, rugged fashion of the rights of the workman, and is looked upon as a leader in his own small circle.

She had gathered some roses as they walked down the path, and while he talked to her she pulled the fragrant leaves from the stems. Long years after, she could not endure the memory of the day she ever forgot—the garden with its fragrant blossoms, the tall, dark, and the cool spreading shade, the bright lovely face framed in the bright brown hair, the white hand playing with the crimson buds—a picture so beautiful that Mr. Ford looked on in admiration too great for words.

He was silent for some little time, his heart troubled within him at what he had to say. He looked at Mr. Ford and while he owned to himself that he had never seen any woman one-half so fair, he thought how much happier she would be living here in the midst of her own people, than tossed about on the waves of the great world. 'Immy wondered what he was thinking of, why he looked so grave and anxious, thoughts brought so stern an expression to his face, and why he was glancing at the roses so intently. He was a doctor, fear, regret, and admiration. Her face grew crimson under his lingering gaze.

'I have no need to fear him,' she thought to herself, with some little indignation. 'He must have something important to say, or he never would have asked me to come out here.'

'What have you to tell me?' she asked, at length, with a coquettish smile. 'And then the grave returned to his face, and he sighed deeply. 'I do not like my mission,' he said. 'You must always remember that I am not here to do anything but to do it for your good, and that I may be of use to you in some way that I have not thought of.'

'A man of what kind?' asked Mr. Ford in surprise. 'That low-born, ill-bred radical. I should expect all the dead and gone of the world to rise up in wrath against him if I even thought of such a thing.'

'Then what?' 'I have fallen very low during my lifetime,' he said, 'and my name is sullied, their honor tarnished. But I have not fallen so low as to allow a man of that kind to make his house here.'

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he said, 'Some people would perhaps call it good news; I shall have to think of it as you will. I should like to see you alone,' he continued and Immy saw the way to the pretty seat under the elm tree.

'This is my drawing-room,' she said with a bright smile; 'but I would not more than I have received a visitor here before.'

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and drew his face down to hers. She said that he was the truest, the truest, the best of husbands, and that she loved him and would live with him as long as he would live with her. What had come to this lovely young wife of his? He little dreamed of the terrible struggle going on in his heart he believed to be all his own.

'I seemed to her that her very soul was torn in twain; she forgot with an intensity of longing for wealth, the rank, the position, the grandeur that she had once possessed. She was not surprised at what she had heard; there had always been in her a certain amount of ambition, and her mother was a lady, and that she herself was not in her right place, if she were not the wife of a gentleman. All the glorious advantages she had longed for, because she loved her husband and would not leave him.

How happy she would have been, installed at the mansion of the grand man! How the great people of the great world would have admired her! How the great people of the great world would have admired her! How the great people of the great world would have admired her!

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