

# STORY OF THE WEDDING RING.

By BERTHA M. CLAY.

Author of "A Queen Among Women," "How Will It End," "The Burden of a Secret," Etc.

## CHAPTER XVI.

Ismay Waldron had felt the pain of ungratified wishes; she had known what it was to be poor, yet to long to be rich—to long for pleasure and gaiety, yet to have all denied to her. But in all her life she had never suffered anything like this sorrow—the sorrow of unavailing remorse, of repentance, without the power of atonement, of love that knows itself all unworthy of ever meeting with love in return.

Lord Carlswold took her to the seaside, but she looked no better when she came back. The music of the waves could not drown the voice of her heart. It was so aroused that never again was Ismay Waldron to lull her conscience, to sleep or to forget the wrong she had done.

Even dress had lost its charm. All the diamonds of Golconda could not have restored her peace. She began to excuse herself from accepting invitations, to find reasons why she should not go out—and this, too, when Lord Carlswold said, she was in the pride of her glorious beauty.

The struggle was killing her; it seemed all the greater that for so long she had forgotten Paul. She was always picturing to herself the delight of a re-union with him; night after night she dreamed that these ten years were but a dream—that she was at home with Paul in their little cottage, clinging to him and praying to him never to let her go; she would wake with tears streaming down her face, and weep again that it was but a dream.

"I would go back to him," she said to herself one day, with a deep sob—"I would go back to him if I could." And that idea took possession of her—the idea of going back—giving up all the advantages she had gained—leaving her beautiful world. Was it a beautiful world? Her heart ached for some little love and tenderness—she was tired of her loveless life—wearied with the weight of her sin.

"I would go back to him if I could," she said, and just as the thought of going to Bryn had once seemed to her to embody all that was desirable in the world, so now the thought of going back to Paul made her heart beat with delight.

She pictured his happiness. What would he say if, some day he should wake up suddenly and see her standing before him? She remembered his loving words—his tender and caressing manner—his worship of her. He would be overpowered with delight. She forgot that the wrong she had done him was a grievous one, such as man never forgets and seldom forgives.

She must go back. Of course Lord Carlswold would never forgive her; but she did not seem to care now so much for that. She had tried both lives, and she knew that for real happiness, the life she had led with her husband was the truest.

"I will go to him," she said. "I am not happy here. I cannot live away from him any longer." In her own mind she felt sure that Lord Carlswold would never dishonor her boy. He had brought him up for ten years as his heir, and it did not seem probable that he would disappoint him now. She resolved to go; and once having made the resolve, she was very much happier for it. Then the practical details began to bother her. She had heard nothing of Paul's whereabouts. Was he still in the little cottage? Her heart contracted with a sudden, terrible fear—was he living or was he dead?

When should she go? The sooner she could find an opportunity the better it would be. Then she was obliged to put aside her thought for a time. Lord Carlswold had made a point of her attendance at Lady Brentway's ball, and she was compelled to go.

She was especially careful about her dress that night. She wore a robe of pale violet velvet, with a suite of superb diamonds. Lord Carlswold's present to her. Never in her life had Ismay Waldron looked more beautiful.

The rooms were crowded when she reached Lady Brentway's. As usual she was surrounded by a crowd of admirers, and then she forgot for a time her doubts, her fears, her troubles. Her beautiful face grew radiant; her eyes shone bright as stars; she was the very embodiment of beauty and grace; her voice sounded like sweetest music, her laugh was sweeter than the chime of bells. She was enchanting; people looked at her with wonder. She danced two or three times, and then, feeling tired, sat down. Lady Brentway seated herself by her side.

"I have the lion of the season here, Mrs. Waldron. Will you allow me to introduce him to you?" "To which particular lion do you allude?" she asked.

"Mr. Dale, of Ravensdale, the 'popular member,' as he is called. He is a very handsome man, with a sad, half-bitter expression of face. You must charm him and convert him; we want him on the Tory side. I told Lord Brentway if any one could convert him it must be you."

"Making conversions is not much in my line," replied Mrs. Waldron.

"Political, of course. I have made many political conversions." "I hope they were sincere ones," said the beautiful woman, with a laugh. "I hope so, too. If nature had gifted me with a face like yours, I should have made more. Here comes Mr. Dale. I have been wondering why he accepted my invitation; he goes nowhere."

The next moment a tall figure was bowing before her. Lady Brentway said:

"Mrs. Waldron, allow me to introduce Mr. Dale to you."

Then, bent upon hospitable cares, Lady Brentway moved away.

Ismay looked into the handsome face bending near her, and then a short, sudden, stifled cry, came from her lips, her face grew suddenly white as death, her eyes assumed a startled, incredulous look.

"Mr. Dale!" she said, in a low voice like that of one in a dream.

There was no answering look; the face into which she gazed was cold and dark and proud.

She clasped her hands tightly.

"Pray, pardon me," she said. "You are so much like—it is—it is Paul himself! Paul, do you not know me?"

"I have not the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Waldron," he said, turning abruptly away.

She stood looking after him, wonder, fear, love, dismay, all striving for mastery.

"It is Paul!" she said. "As surely as I breathe, there is my husband, and he does not know me."

The whole room seemed turned round. A nervous cry rose to her lips which she could with difficulty repress. She looked after the tall, stately figure.

"It is—it must be Paul," she murmured. "That is Paul's figure and Paul's face; yet—no, I must be dreaming. How could Paul be Mr. Dale, and a member of Parliament? I must be going mad."

Lord Brecon came to ask her to dance; she declined, and he looked with wonder at her pale, agitated face.

"Are you ill, Mrs. Waldron?" "No," she replied. "I am well enough; but I am puzzled. Lord Brecon, do you know anything of the new member, Mr. Dale?"

"Nothing much," he answered. "I know that he is wonderfully clever, a man—he has risen by his own efforts. I have heard that he is a self-made man."

"What was he originally?" she asked, with trembling lips. "I cannot tell; I have never heard. He rose from the humblest ranks, I believe. Does he interest you, Mrs. Waldron?"

She played with her fan some moments before she answered.

"All clever people interest me," she replied.

"I wish I were clever," said Lord Brecon.

"Is he—Mr. Dale—married, do you know?" she inquired.

"I think not. I have met him several times, but I have never heard of a Mrs. Dale."

And then Lord Brecon, seeing that Mrs. Waldron was distraite and unwilling to talk, went away.

"It is Paul," she said, as she watched the stately figure. "I remember that fashion of bending his head—I remember—ah, me, how shall I bear it? It is most surely Paul!"

He was standing somewhat apart, looking over some photographs. She watched him with a beating heart; her hands trembled so that her fan fell from them, her pulse throbbled, every nerve seemed strained.

"It must be Paul; no other man living ever had a face like his! Dare I speak to him? He did not know me; I must go to him, or I shall die."

With all the heart, long repressed love of her heart shining in her face, the light gleaming in her jewels, and falling on her rich, violet dress, she crossed the room and went up to him.

He did not move when he saw her. She laid her hand on his arm. He looked up in polite, cold surprise.

"Paul," she whispered, bending low until her beautiful head was near his, "Paul, do you not know me? I am Ismay—Ismay, your wife."

He smiled, politely still, but coldly.

"I fear you are mistaken, madam; I have no wife."

She looked at him long and earnestly.

"Can I be mistaken?" she said. "I must believe—"

But the words died on her lips. Lord Brentway joined them with some remark about the warmth of the room. She was obliged to control herself, although the effort was terrible. Mr. Dale left them with some excuse as soon as he could.

"He does not know me," she said. She would not believe that his want of recognition was real. She was in a passion of love, of sorrow and dismay. When she looked round the room again Mr. Dale was gone, but Mrs. Waldron did not leave until she had obtained his address; she had resolved, come what might, to call upon him.

## CHAPTER XVII.

Mr. Dale sat in his room alone, on the table before him lay pamphlets, papers, reports, all of which he had been resolutely studying. But from each page a lovely face looked at him.

"Paul, Paul, I am Ismay—your wife," sounded ever in his ears.

He studied hard; he tried to drown this voice. He had been haunted all night by both.

"It is my own fault," he said to himself. "I went to the ball purposely to see her—I thought to satisfy the hunger of my heart; still the fever of my longing, by looking once more on her face, and it has been the worst thing I could have done. How dare she to think I could forgive her! Forgive such a wrong as that! No! not if I were a peasant and she were a princess!" He turned again to his books, but the lovely face seemed to shine on the pages.

The morning sun came bright and warm into the room; there was a fragrance of mignonette and heliotrope

which brought the garden at Ashburnham back freshly to his mind. He laid his pen down with a sigh of despair.

"How can I go to work," he said, "if I am troubled in this way?"

"A lady wishes to see you, sir," announced the servant. "She would not give her name, but said her business was very important."

"Show her in here," he said. "It is about some subscription or charity, I suppose."

He looked once more at his book, to note the page, and when he raised his eyes again he saw Ismay standing near him—Ismay, his beautiful wife, once so beloved. The morning sunbeams fell upon her lovely face, on her sweeping dress, on the white hands so tightly clasped. She looked at him eagerly.

"Paul!" she cried. "You are Paul; neither your changed name nor your changed position can deceive me. You are Paul—my husband."

She went up to him with an eager step—she knelt at his feet and raised her face to his.

"Speak one word to me," she said, "I am Ismay, and, oh, Paul, I am come to pray you to pardon me—to implore you to take me back—to tell you how grieved I am, how sorry for my sin."

The words died on her lips in a passion of tears. The stern pride and coldness of his face frightened her. He drew away from the touch of the white, jeweled hands.

"I have no wife," he said. "The woman I loved with my whole soul, who promised me her truth, and faith, deserted me. I have no wife."

Her voice was broken with sobs as she answered him.

"I know it was wrong—crucially, wickedly wrong—but I was tempted, and I fell. Oh, Paul, be merciful to me! I was so young, so vain, so weak. Forgive me, and take me back."

She might have been how terrible the struggle—great drops stood upon his forehead, his whole frame trembled.

"You ask me to take you back, Why? Tell me why?"

"Because I love you—because it seems to me that my soul has been in a long sleep. It has awakened and knows no rest. My heart cries for you—I love you. Take me back, Paul."

"You were happy enough for many years without me," he said.

"No, I was not happy—I was intoxicated with vanity—I was engrossed in pleasure—I was given up heart and soul to the world, I never stopped to think—I never dared to do so—I have lived as in a dream. I have awakened from that dream, and I am here, kneeling at your feet, praying you to pardon me."

"Do you remember that you robbed me of my son," he said—"that you took him from me, and never thought of my claim to his love as well as your own?"

She bowed her head, while the tears rained from her eyes.

"I am guilty," she said—"oh, so guilty, Paul! I pray you forgive me and take me back."

"You feel that you will not be happy again unless I do, Ismay?"

"Never!" she replied.

"Then listen to me. The hour of my vengeance has come at last. What I suffered when you left me, only Heaven knows. The agony of death cannot equal the agony of outraged love and despair. I will not tell you of all my pain lest you should pity me, but in my anguish I swore that I would take vengeance. Now the time has come when I can keep my vow—when I can send you from my feet—when I can refuse your prayer, and tell you that never, never more shall you be wife of mine!"

She bowed her head with a deep, bitter sob, and then she raised her arms and tried to clasp them round his neck. But he drew back and caught from her hands; he held her hands so tightly that he left great red marks upon them.

"Woman—weak, vain, light of purpose, light of love, what do you know of the depth of a man's heart? What do you know of the force of his passion, the strength of his love? Weak, frail, easily led, ready to sell your dearest and best to the first bidder, you think you can play with a man's heart as children play with a ball? You think that you may lay a man's life in ruin—blight it, drive him mad with despair—and then win him back with a smile and a caress!"

She raised her beautiful white face to his, her quivering lips could hardly utter a sound.

"I own that I am guilty; I make no excuse; I pray you pardon me. You loved me so dearly once, Paul; for that love's sake, forgive me now."

He raised his hand with a warning gesture.

"Do not raise an evil spirit within me," he cried—"do not, if you are wise, remind me of that love!"

His voice was harsh, his manner stern.

"You are so changed," she sobbed; "you are so altered."

"Who has changed me? Who turned my strong, bright, glad young life into living death? Who changed love into hate? Whose fault is it that for long years I have been ready to curse my fate and die?"

"I will try to make amends," she pleaded. "Oh, Paul, forgive me! I will be so humble, so good, I am not the same—my soul is awake, I care no more for anything on earth but you."

"It is too late," he returned. "Years ago, no wifely love, no pity pleaded for mercy for the man you were deeming to a living death. And my only fault was loving you!"

"Love me again," she said; "try me again. If I could die to undo my fault, I would."

"Listen to me, if by my refusal I broke your heart and mine, I would still refuse. You yielded to vanity. I yield to pride. I will not take back to my heart and my home the woman

who deserted me because I could not minister to her vanity. You left me because I was poor; I am rich now, and I refuse to take you back."

She shrank shuddering as though he had struck her a sudden blow.

"You refuse?" she repeated.

"Yes, absolutely. I never wish to see your false face or listen to your false voice again."

The beautiful face dropped until it was hidden from his eyes. He rose from his chair, every limb trembling; he could not have borne the sight of it another moment.

"You have sought this interview," he said, trying to speak calmly; "let it end. Do not say I have a hard heart—you broke my heart years ago. I bid you farewell."

He heard her cry to Heaven to have mercy on her—he saw her fall with moment half hesitating.

"If I speak to her again—if I touch her—I am lost," he said, and then he left the room and summoned his housekeeper.

"There is a lady in the library—she is ill," he said. "Be very kind to her. When she is better send for a cab; she will want to go home."

And he himself left the house lest any cry of hers should reach him and he should go back to her.

"I have had my revenge," he said to himself; "but never yet did vengeance cost so dear."

## BRITISH WAR SONGS.

Marital Music Is Now All the Rage in England.

There is a British industry that is very busy just now—one that is not subsidized by the War Office or controlled by the government in any way, but which nevertheless reaps a golden harvest on account of the Transvaal war, says the London Daily Mail. For, be it known, the music hall poet is on the warpath, and as a consequence Messrs. Francis, Day and Hunter are besieged night and day by a crowd of music sellers and their satellites, clamoring for "war songs," and somehow they do not mind whether the lyrics are new or old, only they must be soul stirring and the words patriotic.

Indeed, so great is the demand, that these well known song publishers cannot print the music fast enough, and numerous editions of such songs as "Tommy Atkins" and "The Soldiers of the Queen," three or four years old though they may be, are selling like wildfire.

Every one must have heard "Tommy Atkins," and during the Diamond Jubilee year "The Soldiers of the Queen," or, at any rate, be perfectly familiar with their respective choruses; but the up to date ballads with patriotic refrains may not be so familiar.

A distinct outcome of the Boer trouble can be traced in "Under the Same Old Flag," and even the highly colored lithographed cover of the song overflows with loyalty, depicting as it does a New South Wales lancer ready to do and die for the mother country, and in the act of singing—

Let your voices ring for England,  
And your banners wave on high;  
Brave hearts are burning,  
When the sword is drawn for freedom  
Here's there a "boy" behind will drag;  
England's our mother, and we know  
no other—  
Under the same old flag!

"Another Little Patch of Red" is a song that is having an enormous sale and this is even more up to date than the one just quoted, for it contains a verse that takes in the Transvaal situation right up to President Kruger's ultimatum, followed by a chorus the significance of which cannot be mistaken—

If they want to get the pull on old John Bull,  
They'll have to get up early out of bed;  
As again they've had a slap,  
We shall paint a certain map  
With just another little patch of red!

A third ballad of the same order, but one, adds the Mail, whose popularity has waned somewhat on account of the rumor that Irishmen are serving the Boer flag, is "Irishmen Must Be There." But the chorus, it thinks, is not wanting in the right sentiment—

And what a grand old land to fight for,  
What a grand old nation still!  
When you read your history—  
Don't it make your heart's blood thrill!

We don't know if the quarrel's right or wrong,  
Bedad an' we don't care;  
We only know there's going to be a fight  
And Irishmen must be there!

A song which Mr. Lee Stormont sings to enthusiastic audiences is entitled "Take the Muzzle Off the Lion." The following are the first verse and chorus—

The note of fierce defiance has been hurled,  
And we must prove our rights before the world;  
To make our just demands we did not cease  
(Until the brutal Boers disdained our peace,  
They've tried the game of bluster, bounce and brag,  
And thrown their dirty insults at our flag;  
Now they must fight, and pay—the die is cast,  
And we'll wipe out the errors of the past.

Then take the muzzle off the lion,  
And let him have a go!  
Is Boer or Briton going to rule?  
That's what we want to know!  
Whisper to him "Majuba Hill,"  
Then at his chain he'll pull;  
There's only room for one out there,  
And that's John Bull.

## MISERABLE WOMEN

HOW WOMEN LOSE INTEREST IN THEIR HOUSEHOLDS.

The Hills to Which Women Are Their Cause Much Suffering—The Experience of a Lady Who Has Found a Speedy Cure.

Mrs. Isale T. Comeau, who resides at 83 1-2 Arago street, St. Roch, Quebec, is a teacher of French, English, and music. For many years Mrs. Comeau has suffered greatly from internal troubles, peculiar to her sex, and also from continuous weakness the result of headaches, neuralgia and nervous prostration. Her trouble became so bad that she was forced to give up teaching, and go to an hospital, but the treatment there did not materially benefit her and ultimately she left the hospital still a great sufferer. Meantime her husband having heard of the great value of Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People, purchased a few boxes and prevailed upon his wife to try them. When interviewed as to the merits of the pills Mrs. Comeau gave her story to the reporter about as follows:—

"My trouble came on after the birth of my child, and up to the time I began to use Dr. Williams' Pink Pills I could find nothing to cure me. I suffered much agony, was very weak, had frequent severe headaches, and little or no appetite. It was not long after I began the use of the pills that I found they were helping me very much and after taking them for a couple of months I was as well as ever I had been. My appetite improved, the pains left me, and I gained considerably in flesh and am again able to attend to the lessons of my pupils, and superintend my household work. Since using the pills myself I have recommended them to others and have heard nothing but praise in their favor wherever used."

No discovery of modern times has proved such a boon to women as Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People. Acting directly on the blood and nerves, invigorating the body, regulating the functions they restore health and strength to exhausted women, and make them feel that life is again worth living.

Sold by all dealers in medicine or sent post paid at 50c a box or six boxes for \$2.50, by addressing the Dr. Williams' Medicine Co., Brockville, Ont. Refuse all substitutes.

## AUSTRALIAN TRIBES.

Horrible Rites of the Natives in the Unknown Interior.

Prof. Baldwin Spencer, and F. J. Lillien explorers, have returned from Central Australia with material for a book upon people never before visited by white men.

These Central Australians have totems, like the Alaskan Indians. Every native is born into the clan whose totem is the sun, the moon, the east wind, the bear, the kari-kari tree.

The young savage's totem and clan are not necessarily the same as those of his father. Before sharing the full fellowship of his tribe he must pass through revolting initiation ceremonies.

When a candidate is to be initiated, blood is obtained by cutting his arm, and with his blood as a paste a downy veil is fixed to his skin. Upon the heads of the chief performers are curious structures called churingia. Should one of these fall off during a ceremony it is an omen of very bad import. These churingia are kept in the totem house and no woman or uninitiated man is permitted to look upon them.

It may seem strange that there should be in Central Australia a people practically unknown. But the interior of the Australian Continent is protected from white explorers by the terrible heat and lack of water, which make the whole region practically impassable to whites, though one telegraph line has been driven through the desert.

The bushmen, too, avoid, by a kind of instinct the white men, from whom their fellows have acquired nothing but consumption, drunkenness and early extinction. And the task of following them to their homes in the bush is one of toil, hardship and danger.

NOT AN EXCEPTIONAL CASE.

They say she married for money. That's where they're wrong. She thought she married for money, but she was mistaken.

Then what did she marry for? She hasn't found out yet.

AN IMPROVEMENT.

Pelle—There they go now. They seem to be as good friends as ever.

Lena—Better. They haven't quarreled since they broke their engagement.

PROPERLY LOCATED.

That deal you have just engineered will be a feather in your cap.

A feather in my cap! echoed the financier. It will be a whole bunch of feathers in my wife's hat.

TAKES LIFE EASY.

Williamson—Dr. Squills seems to take life easy here of late.

Henderson—I should say he does. Three of his patients died last week.

NO SUCH WORD.

Muggins—My wife insists upon saying the last word.

Buggins—You're lucky. In the bright lexicon of my wife's vocabulary there is no such word as last.