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LORD MORDEN'S DAUGHTER — OR — THE TRAGEDY OF THE CEDARS.

CHAPTER VI.

"Now, my dear girl, will you please be reasonable? When I told Melville that I intended settling matters forthwith, I meant that I would ask you to declare the engagement off, but the addle-pated noodle must needs interfere in what does not concern him, and make a mess of it."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Lady Clare, "I really believe that he means it!"

"If I do mean it, and I never anticipated any trouble with you."

"Oh, no! Of course, I am of no importance! I have afforded you a little amusement, and now you wish to cast me off, eh? Mr. Edmund Locksley, let me tell you that I do not intend to be cast off! I mean that you shall marry me. Why, there isn't another man who understands me as you do, in the world!"

"Clare!"

"I mean what I say. I will hold you to your promise."

Locksley stared at her in sheer amazement. Then he jumped up and faced the room.

"But, Clare," he went on, desperately, "I do not love you as a man should love his wife."

"Have you only just found that out, Edmund?" she asked.

"Yes."

"How long since?"

"To be precise, about sixty-eight hours," he laughed.

"Oh, I think I understand. You have seen some one prettier, and have fallen in love!"

Lady Clare regarded him half-contemptuously and half-savagely.

"Tell me, is that what is wrong with you?"

Lady Clare's eyes were now dark with anger. It was hard to give him up, and she resolved not to do so without a struggle.

"Edmund," she said, severely, "does it not occur to you that you are proposing to treat me very badly indeed—I should say disgracefully? We have been engaged—"

"Nominally," he interrupted, a little impatiently, but she waved her hand imperiously, and went on:

"We have been engaged for nearly a year, with our parents' consent, and by the promptings of our own hearts. We have even talked of the marriage-day, and I expected this morning that the date would be definitely fixed. Instead of that, you come to me with a long face, and want me to declare the affair off, simply, because you are suffering temporary mental aberration! My dear Edmund, I am highly displeased with you, and gave you credit for more common sense. What

could your father say if he knew of this?"

"He is sure to know of it within a few hours, Clare, replied Locksley."

"Not with my permission! I will not have my future husband ridiculed. Of course you will get over this calumny, for it can be nothing more, and we had better be married at once, to prevent a recurrence. It is bad when the disease attacks a man of six or seven-and-twenty."

Locksley stared at Lady Clare. He had never expected the slightest opposition from her.

"So you refuse to cancel what you are pleased to call an engagement between us?" he said, quietly.

"Certainly, Edmund. I do so for your own sake, most of all, for my sake, and for that of your dear father. His mind is so set upon this marriage that it would break his heart if he were disappointed now. I do not suppose that you have yet been so indiscreet as to talk of love to this—this other creature? You would not be so dishonorable."

"I have told Dora everything," he replied.

"So her name is Dora? Suggestive of a dollish face with red cheeks. Any amount of cunning, and a perpetual simper, eh?"

"I have told Dora how you and I are situated," continued Locksley, "explaining that neither cared one iota for the other. I convinced her that you would promptly relinquish your claims upon me when you knew that I had met one whom I loved with all my heart and soul. I have told her that you would be her friend—her sister, and I never dreamed that you would stand in her way, Clare. Since I have found that I have a heart, I will not marry without love."

Lady Clare turned her face from him, a bitter struggle raging in her breast.

"This is a cruel insult that you offer to me," she said, at last; "but I refuse to release you, Edmund Locksley. I refuse to give up to another that which is mine by right."

He was startled by her resolute tones, and an angry light flashed into his eyes.

"Then I have been deceived in you," he retorted. "I thought that you had some nobility of heart, but I find that I was mistaken. I will not marry you, Lady Clare—I will not marry any woman who values me as she would a favorite horse, or a useful servant. I have been honest with you, and shall consider the matter at an end, whether you like it or not. Your disappointment does not count

against the love of two hearts. You are wealthy, handsome, and have all that makes life worth living except love, and be sure that that will come some day."

Her face was still turned from him, but he saw that her lips were quivering.

"Clare," he went on, "forgive me, if my words seem cruel. When I came to you, I thought that you would have been glad to hear what I have told you—even if you laughed at me a little. Oh, if you knew the meaning of love, as I have found it, Clare, it would teach you that life without love is a barren waste!"

Lady Clare turned toward him, and there was a look upon her handsome face that he never forgot. Its expression was womanly, tender, and there was agony in her eyes.

"Cease!" she whispered, passionately. "Can you not see that every word is a knife in my heart? Can you not see that I have loved you for many long months with a strength that only a strong nature like mine is capable of? Oh, Edmund, how blind you have been! how blind you have been! You will not throw away a love like mine for what is but water compared with luscious wine?"

She was kneeling at his feet, her splendid form shaking with sobs, her luxuriant dark hair falling about her in showers.

"Clare," said Locksley, too startled, too bewildered almost, to adequately realize the situation. "Clare, you surprise me, you distress me, more than I can tell."

He caressed her shining hair tenderly, his heart filled with pity.

"I never thought that you cared for me in this way. I am shocked, Clare, terribly shocked."

The door open, but he did not hear it, and the elder Locksley viewed the scene with a smile of satisfaction, and withdrew.

"I am terribly shocked, Clare," he repeated. "I would rather have sacrificed ten years of my life than this should have occurred. I can hardly believe it yet; I cannot bring myself to associate you with love—you who have always pretended to scoff at it."

"I shall never make light of it again," replied Lady Clare. "I did not know my own heart until I learned that I might lose you. Edmund, you will never know what I suffered in those few moments. Although I have never seen this creature—this Dora—I felt that I hated her—I felt that I should hate her forever! If my love were slighted, I believe that I should become a female Anteros. I should live for vengeance!"

She sprang to her feet, her hands clinched, her eyes burning with fury.

"I should live but for vengeance, and my love would turn to the bitterest hatred. I should hate even you, Edmund Locksley, but her worst of all!"

She turned suddenly and left the room, heeding not Locksley's cry:

"Clare, Clare! You must not leave me like this!"

Lady Clare Moncrieff strode haughtily, furiously, from the room, and the door closed after her with a sharp snap.

Locksley stared at the oak panels, his brain in a whirl.

He was vexed and agitated more than he cared to own, and determined to bring matters to a crisis forthwith. He would tell his father of his love for Dora Deane, and of his interview with Lady Clare. If Mr. Locksley quarrelled with him—if he refused to acknowledge Dora, then the young surgeon would go away, though a pang of bitterness shot through his heart while the resolve was being made. He would leave his old home, and marry Dora. They would not be poor, for, besides his profession, he had a thousand a year left him by an uncle on his mother's side. Until now he had never felt particularly grateful to his uncle, but at last he blessed his memory.

At that moment there was a tap at the door, and his father entered, his haggard face flushed as the young man had never seen it before.

One moment he paused irresolute, then held out his hands to his son, saying:

"Edmund, my boy, I have been very miserable while you have been away. You must not quarrel with me again. Until now, I have had no opportunity to speak to you alone."

(To be continued.)

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