

The Story of the Wedding Ring

By Bertha M. Clay.

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took from my mother's finger for me; I shall have those buried with me." The last letter, but one, was about to start from Chester, and would walk to the town of Ashburnham, where he would wait for a few days. The last letter of all came from Ashburnham, and was dated July the ninth. Surely there was never a more pitiful petition presented to a man's heart than that which would have touched the hardest heart, and Lord Carleswood covered his face with his hands as he listened. "Katherine writes from a small stationer's shop, and the last penny she had in the world was to pay for the postage of the letter. She besought him, for her dear mother's sake, for the love of her own, and for a little money—to save her from starvation and death—'ever so little,' or she must take her child in her arms and die down by the roadside." That was the last—the tragedy ended.

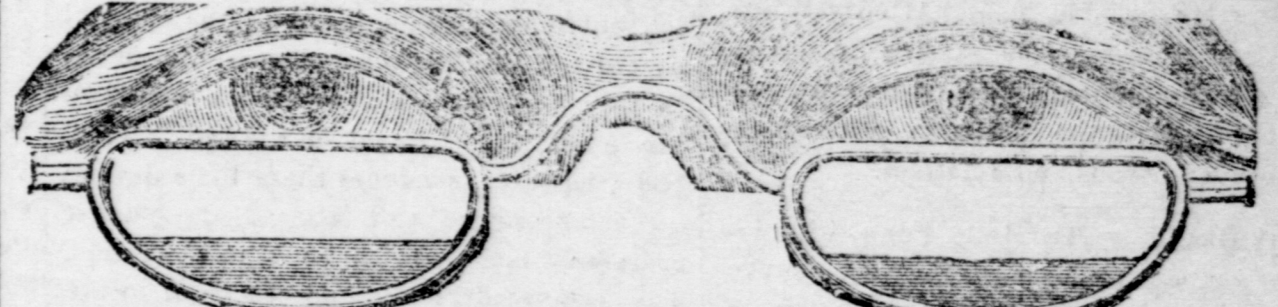
Some, strong, with a fine face and a manly figure—industrious, and very clever, they say, at all kinds of mechanical work. He is a complete radical in politics, believing in the rights of the workman, and is eloquent after a grand, rugged fashion of his own. He makes speeches, and is looked upon as a leader in his small circle. Lord Carleswood held up his hands and looked at the man with a look of intense interest. "Enough!" he cried. "And what do you say his calling is?" "Mr. Ford looked half puzzled. "Some people called him the Squire's steward, others his gamekeeper—to me he seemed to hold both places. "Does his wife seem very attached to him?" was the next question. The lawyer smiled. "I am a better judge, my lord, of the merits of a man than of a lady's affection. I suppose she loves him. All wives love their husbands—do they not?" "By no means," was the cynical reply. "You say the boy is healthy and likely to live?" "I am no judge of children either; but I have seen a more beautiful child. He looked strong and well." Then there was a silence for some minutes; the lord seemed engrossed in thought, his eyes were fixed on his lips firmly closed and his hands tightly clasped. Once a deep sigh came from him, and then he was silent again. He raised his eyes, and looked at the lawyer's face. For the strangeness of the glance Mr. Ford felt sure that some difficult proposition was coming.

"I have no need to fear him," she thought to herself, with some little impatience. "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. Her eyes were fixed on his face, and he smiled slowly and looked at Mr. Ford again. "I do not like my mission," he said. "You must always remember that I understand the only way in which I can be of use to you in time to come." His grave voice, his earnest manner, surprised her. She raised her eyes to him, and on it was the simple word of a startled child. "Only heaven knows," continued the grave voice, "whether what I have to say to you is for your good, or whether it will come of it. Listen, Mr. Waldron, and decide as you will." Slowly, deliberately, weighing each word, Mr. Ford told her the whole story, omitting no single grain of evidence, dwelling on her mother's folly as far as possible, yet not making it appear. As she listened, the dainty wild-rose bloom faded from her face, her eyes dilated with wonder that was almost fear. Her whole figure trembled, and her last words sounded to her as though they came from the clouds. A red mist swam before her eyes, and she hid her face herself with a great gasping cry. "You must be brave," he said; "you have worse to bear." And she said, "am really the great lord's grandchild?" "There is not a legal doubt of it," he replied. "Listen yet, Mr. Waldron. You are the grandfather of Katherine Ismay, daughter of Lord Carleswood, who ran away from home with Thornton Cameron. You are the grandfather of Lord Carleswood, the Master of Bralyn and its dependencies. The child playing there may one day be Lionel, Lord Carleswood; you yourself may be a wealthy peer. But there is one condition attaching to all this—a condition I am ashamed to lay before you, and one that I cannot advise you to accept. The option rests entirely with yourself."

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