

Wedded and Parted.

BY BERTHA M. CLAY.

Author of "A Woman's Vengeance," "Between Two Loves," "A Fatal Wedding," "Which Loved Him Best," "Her Second Love."

(CONTINUED.)

She laughed, and the light gleamed in her jewels.

"I can give you a faint idea," she replied. "I am happy because I love you and have one of the dearest fathers—my ideal gentleman. I am happy because I belong to a grand old race, on whose name there has never rested a stain, on whose shield there has been no blot, and because I am what all the Carres are, pleasant to see, because I am young, and my life, all full of bright possibilities, lies before me."

The least gleam of mischief came into her eyes, and she looked at him with a bright smile.

"I am happy, too, because I am queen of myself and all that surrounds me—also because my heart is light and free. Are those reasons sufficient, papa?"

"More than enough," he replied; and then, as she went away, he asked himself how he was to take this sparkling cup of life from her lips—how he was to change her innocent gladness into deepest misery. From his lips came the prayer:

"Oh, Heaven help me to bear my sorrow, or save me from it!"

Once again he looked at his child as she stood where the light of a large chandelier fell full upon her; and he said to himself it would be easier—much easier—to place her in her coffin and kiss her dead face than to tell her what he had to tell. Yet it must be told, and the time was drawing very near.

The ball was over at last, and the guests, wearied with pleasure, had driven home under the light of the Christmas noon; the lights had been extinguished—the mantle of darkness and silence had fallen over Croombe Abbey. Lady Ianthe slept, dreaming of jewels and flowers and sweet whispered words; but the earl paced to and fro—wringing his hands—with bitter sighs that ended in low broken wailings. He wandered with a light in his hand to the great picture gallery, and stood before the portrait of his dead father. He placed the taper on the ground, and looked up at the face so noble and so stern.

"What have I done with it," he cried, wringing his hands—"this fair inheritance—this spotless name—what have I done with it? I am the last of my race, but I have been the first to act dishonorably. It will be said that I was weak and easily tempted—that I could not distinguish rogues from honest men. They will brand my name as name has never been branded before. They will say, 'Maurice, the eleventh earl, left his family name ruined—left, in fact, less than nothing. Yet I meant to add so much to the glory of my name. What have I done? Oh, Heaven, what have I done?'"

It was pitiful to see the old man fall down before his father's picture, burying his face in his hands, weeping aloud and praying Heaven to pardon him.

Then he rose. Christmas morning had broken; the light of the moon and the stars had given place to the early dawn; the sky was gray, the frost had deepened. He must not be found there by his servants; they would know soon enough what had happened. Let him save his credit while he could. He went back to his own room, carefully closing the door. The day had dawned—the day on which he had to tell her—to strike with his own hands all the brightness and light from his daughter's life. If he could but avert the blow! He knew that the worst of the evil must fall on his beautiful daughter; and how would she, one of the proudest girls in England, bear the blame?

It was easy to see that he came of a heroic race—a race whose sons had high hearts and noble souls, who knew nothing of the craven fear—for, though he had spent the night in aimless wandering, in restless prayers, in bewildered grief and remorse, he was at his place on Christmas morning ready to welcome his visitors and wish them the joys of a season that had no joy for him.

CHAPTER II.

It was come at last, the hour in which the old earl must tell his daughter all—the hour in which he must rob the young life of its brightness and its hopes.

He chose the time when all the house was silent—midnight—when the visitors had gone to rest, and the servants had all retired. He should have her all to himself then, and he could soothe her first outbreak of sorrow. He had said to her:

"Ianthe, when the house is all silent to-night, will you come to the library? I want to see you—I want to talk to you."

She had answered him laughingly, not feeling in the least surprised. It was the day after her birthday; perhaps he had something to say to her.

ner regarding the family jewels or the arrangements for her coming of age. Never a doubt crossed her mind. She dismissed her maid, saying that she was not ready for her yet, and that she need not wait. Then she removed the jewels from her beautiful hair and her white neck, took off her costly evening dress, and put on a warm wrapper. There was a smile on her lips as she made these preparations.

"Now I can talk at my ease," she said to herself.

She went down quietly to the library, wondering why her father had chosen this strange, weird hour of night—wondering why it was so urgent that he should shorten his rest and hers.

She had never known the sensation of fear, but she shuddered a little as she went down the great staircase. The taper that she carried seemed to throw such strange lights and shades; the evergreens on the walls seemed to nod as she passed by.

"A large house in the silence and gloom of night is not very cheerful," thought Lady Ianthe.

Then she opened the door and saw the earl sitting by the fire. She placed the taper on the table and went up to him. She clasped her tender arms round his neck.

"This is quite mysterious, papa," she said—"this midnight meeting."

She started when she saw his white face and trembling lips.

"What is the matter, papa?" she cried. "You are ill, or you have bad news to tell me. Your face is changed. What is it?"

She knelt down by his side and laid her fair face on his hands.

"Tell me, papa—I am always your comforter—tell me what has gone wrong this bright, happy Christmas-tide."

She never forgot the pale, worn face that was bent over hers.

"It is to tell you all, Ianthe, that I asked you to come here; and many a criminal has faced his judge, many a traitor his King, many a coward his foe, with far less of fear than I have of facing you, my only child, because of what I have done."

She was all attention now. The smiles had died from her lips, the playfulness from her manner; her sweet, frank eyes, full of wonder, were looking at him, and he seemed to cower before the clear, bright glance.

"What have you done?" she echoed, slowly. "I do not know what that may be; but of one thing I am quite sure—you have done nothing unworthy of a Carre."

"Alas, alas!" moaned the old Earl, as he bowed his head.

"You shall not frighten me," she said. "I am sure of it. You may have mistaken a shadow for substance, a dream for reality; but you have done nothing unworthy of a Carre. You have the tender, sensitive conscience of a gentleman, and you are making much of a trifle. You have done nothing a gentleman should not do."

"Alas," he moaned, "when I began life I had grand, noble dreams—I meant to do what no Carre before me had ever done! How miserably I have failed only Heaven knows."

"You may say what you like, papa—you will never destroy my faith in you. I could sooner believe that the stars gave no light, that Heaven was unkind, that the sun was dark, than believe that you had done wrong. A Carre do wrong! Papa, you speak thoughtlessly!"

"Listen to me, Ianthe!" he cried. "If I could give my life to undo what I have done, I would give it cheerfully; if any pain, any suffering, any torture of mine could avail, I would bear it. Nothing is of any avail, and yet I meant and hoped that it would all be so different."

She was growing alarmed now. What evil idea possessed him? What guileless folly had he magnified into a wrong?

"Papa, will you tell me what it is? Do not tremble so. If you had done all the wrong in the world, it would make no difference to me—I should but love you all the more, all the better. If the whole world turned upon you and accused you, I should uphold you. Remember how I love you."

She smoothed the white hair from the careworn brow; she kissed the deep lines that furrowed the thin face.

(To be Continued.)

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	Assets.	Surplus.
1893	\$6,453,309.56	\$229,292.86
1894	6,597,336.30	359,783.12
1895	6,797,391.05	435,113.55
1896	7,039,323.43	507,348.19
1897	7,236,555.75	548,321.09
1898	7,544,227.02	574,224.75
1899	7,991,042.63	576,807.50
1900	8,482,038.00	586,040.24
1901	9,013,082.63	607,932.00
	Premium Income.	Total Income.
1893	\$ 964,201.08	\$1,261,936.51
1894	989,552.73	1,296,145.86
1895	1,040,240.77	1,353,713.38
1896	1,107,779.45	1,421,686.70
1897	1,182,965.15	1,525,630.16
1898	1,278,649.26	1,665,430.85
1899	1,444,862.27	1,833,919.16
1900	1,575,176.25	1,959,882.01
1901	1,735,036.06	2,165,141.94
	Notices of Death.	Amount of Insurance in Force.
1893	\$456,000	\$35,914,417
1894	452,628	36,312,041
1895	498,969	36,932,148
1896	418,436	38,086,849
1897	604,811	39,943,575
1898	571,316	42,222,364
1899	600,206	46,054,820
1900	594,110	50,191,853
1901	685,472	52,946,044

From the foregoing tables it will be observed that more than two and one-half million dollars have been added to the Assets during the period outlined, that the Premium Income has increased seven hundred seventy thousand dollars, that the surplus to policy holders has increased nearly three-fold, and that over seventeen million dollars more insurance is now in force than at the beginning of the term designated.

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