

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.)

"Was there no other alternative? An idea occurred to her. She would see Herman Culross herself, and ask him if he could suggest nothing but marriage; he would not dare to make love to her himself. She felt sure of that—he stood too much in awe of her—but he would listen, and he would perhaps suggest something else.

She would see him early in the morning, and tell him that nothing should induce her to consent to the marriage—it was simply an absurdity—but that, if he could find some means of befriending her father, she would be grateful to him all her life. Then she tried to sleep, but her pillow that night seemed a hard one. There was no rest to be found on it; she could only meditate on the morrow's meeting.

She rose early; she resolved to see him as soon as she could—to end the suspense and the misery, to see what could be done. Unconsciously, she lingered long over her toilet; she wished to look her very best—not to attract his attention, but that she might impress him the more deeply with her dignity.

She remembered then that it would not perhaps be very pleasant to breakfast alone with a man whom she intended to crush with her scorn. She sent an apology to him, and ordered breakfast to be served to him in the dining-room. Herman hardly knew what to argue from that—did it bode good or ill fortune? He was soon to know; while Lady Ianthe summoned all the pride and courage of her race to do battle with the man who was at the same time her greatest friend and her greatest foe.

CHAPTER VI.

One of the prettiest rooms in Croombe Abbey was the morning-room. It was set aside for the use of the ladies of the family, and was furnished with the utmost taste and elegance. It opened into a conservatory that even in winter was filled with blooming flowers and singing birds; that opened, in its turn, on to a soft green lawn, where, during the summer, pretty fountains rippled and grand old trees cast a grateful shade. It was an elegant rather than a handsome room. White lace curtains, hangings of pale-rose silk, a few exquisite water-colors, and a white Psyche with a basket of crimson flowers at her foot, made it a charming retreat.

It was here that Lady Ianthe resolved upon seeing Herman. She sent to say that she awaited him, and through the wide open door he caught a view of her as she stood expecting him. She was leaning against the white Psyche, her white hands touching the crimson flowers, her elegant morning dress sweeping the ground, her graceful figure slightly bent, deep thought and grave anxiety on the beautiful, pure, high-bred face.

The man's whole heart went out to her with deep, passionate love that was almost pain.

"She is my queen," he thought—"beautiful as she is proud; but I will win her, if she is to be won."

She did not hear him at first; and when, at the sound of footsteps, she looked up and saw him, her face burned with a crimson blush. He went hastily forward to greet her; and she could not help seeing the passion in his face, the love in his eyes. He held out his hand hurriedly to her; but she shrank from the impassioned greeting.

"Good morning, Mr. Culross," she said—"I wished to see you, if you have a little time to spare."

"I have always time to spare for you, Lady Ianthe. I ask for nothing better than to give my whole life to you."

She held up her hand, drawing back from him with such a gesture of scorn that he could not mistake it. Then, for half a minute, she was silent—not from want of words, but because she had so much to say that she hardly knew where to begin. He took advantage of her silence.

"Lady Ianthe," he began, "you have seen Lord Carre; may I hope and pray that you have a favorable answer for me?"

She saw the passionate love and wistfulness in his face. In any other's it would have touched her deeply; in him it simply hardened her heart. Her proud bright eyes glanced serenely at him.

"It is of that I wished to speak to you, Mr. Culross; let me ask you first is there no mistake? Have you really laid such a proposition before the Earl, my father?"

"There is no mistake, Lady Ianthe," he replied; "I love you, and the one passionate, longing desire of my heart is to make you my wife."

"We will place the matter in a truer light, Mr. Culross," she observed, her lip curling. "My father is in urgent need of some money, and this money you have offered him as the price of his daughter's hand."

"That is an ungenerous and—par-

don me—untruthful way of stating the fact. Lady Ianthe, I ask you to be my wife because I love you as I believe man has rarely loved woman before; I love you so that I would freely give my life for you."

She drew her graceful figure to its full height, and looked at him.

"Do you know, Mr. Culross," she said, "that for you to talk to me about what you please to call love is great presumption?"

"Why, Lady Ianthe?" he asked, calmly.

"The question hardly requires an answer," she replied. "We are of a different race, of a different order. I have no wish to be rude or to speak unpleasant truths, but are you aware that, but for the fact of my father's being indebted to you, you would never have been a visitor at Croombe?"

"I bless the happy fact of the debt," he remarked.

"You ask me, Lady Ianthe, to marry you," she said. "Listen. The women of my race have never yet contracted a low marriage."

"Pardon me," he interrupted, with a hot flush. "I should not call a marriage with myself a low marriage."

"I should," she declared, with cold hauteur; "the women of my race have married always in their own rank. You cannot ask me to forget the traditions of my order so far as to marry the son of a man who owes his position to trade."

"I do ask it, Lady Ianthe," he said.

"I should expect my dead ancestors to rise from their graves and cry out against such a desecration, as I may call it, Mr. Culross," she rejoined, quickly.

"There are desecrations that seem to me even greater, Lady Ianthe," he said, quietly. "You do well to speak of such things as the traditions of your race; your ideas are

indeed extraordinary. The naughty exclusiveness of high birth is fast dying out; man meets his fellow-man now on more equal terms; there are more aristocracies recognized now than of birth, which is after all a mere accident, you know."

She drew back, as though the words had stung her.

"I know nothing of the kind," she returned, haughtily. "Wealth I consider a mere accident, because fortune is blind and never follows merit; but with nobility it is quite another thing."

"There are other aristocracies," he said, "that will in time do away with this; the nobility of genius, of talent, of industry, of virtue, is, to my mind, superior to mere nobility of birth."

"We will argue no more," she decided, "for we shall never agree. I value noble birth above everything else; and, believe me, Mr. Culross, I could not overlook the want of it."

She turned haughtily away, but he drew nearer to her.

"Lady Ianthe, stay and listen to me. It was not to argue on this world-worn topic that we have met. Your opinions are part of yourself; I respect them—I will never seek to controvert them—I will refrain from ever giving utterance to mine. Try to forget and to overlook these barriers of caste—try to think of me only as the man who loves you so that he would die for you."

His words died away in a passionate murmur; the passion of his love shone in his face.

"I cannot," she replied; "I could never forget the distance between us so as to love you—do not ask me."

"Then you decidedly refuse me?" he said.

Suddenly there came to her mind the memory of the old Earl kneeling with outstretched hands, and crying to her for help. Could she send this only chance of help far from him?

"Stay, Mr. Culross," she said, hastily; "let me ask you, in my turn, can you not be generous, and help my father without—without reference to me?"

"No," he replied, calmly, "you ask what is beyond me—I cannot."

"It is so like a trader," she cried, proudly, "to ask a price even for his virtues, to sell even his benevolence, to wish to purchase a wife whom he can obtain on no other terms. A man of birth would save my father and scorn to make his daughter's hand the price of his safety."

(To be continued.)

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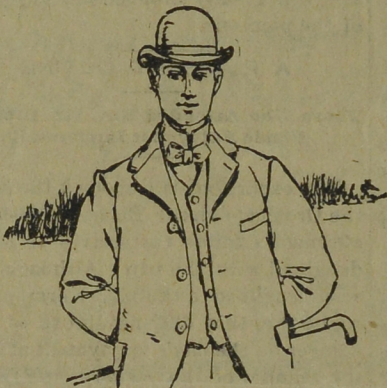
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