

A Golden Heart

BY BERTHA M. CLAY

Author of "The Gypsy's Daughter," "Another Woman's Husband," "A Heart's Bitterness," "A Mad Love," "A Heart's Idol," "Gladys Garry," Etc.

(Continued from last week.)
She never forgets France; nor do I. Some day I shall go back to it, and the remembrance I shall take with me will be of the cold hearts and icy nature of Englishmen," said Lola, slowly; and with those words she left him.

CHAPTER VII.

The days passed on; the old Squire was happy and content. He was now to all intents and purposes a rich man. Lord Rhyssworth had settled on him such a sum of money as would enable him to live in luxury and comfort at White Cliffe; and, when the old man died, it was all to revert to his daughter, Dolores never forgot the day when her lover came, with all the papers and deeds needful to this end in his hand, and asked to see her. She always obeyed even his mad wish; so she went at once to him. There were no excuses, no coquettish delays to enhance the value of her presence.

That morning she thought he looked rather grave and anxious. She asked if he was troubled, and he said "No," but that he had something very serious to say to her. She sat down to listen.

"You must know, Dolores," he said, "that, whenever the heads of our house have married, it has been their custom to bring presents of costly jewels to the bride. Darling, I would give you jewels worthy of a queen's acceptance—then they would not be good enough for you—put in their place I bring you these papers, and my wedding-present to you is this sum of money that I have settled on your father. It will make him rich for life, and at his death it will come all to you. Take them to your hands, Dolores, and you yourself shall give them to him."

She thanked him in simple, kindly words; but he was not content.

"I want something in return, Dolores. Do you know what it is?"
"No," she replied. She smiled to think how little she could give him.

"I want something you have never given before, and to make it of any value you must give it to me of your own free will. I want to kiss you, Dolores—only one. Will you give it to me?"

She was silent for awhile, and the fair, young face grew very pale. Then she slowly took the papers in her hand and held up her face to kiss him. It was done so innocently, so solemnly, that he was somewhat awed.

"New," she said, "I will never give even one thought to any other man." "I am sure you will not, my darling," cried the delighted squire, "I do not know why I should be blessed with the love of such a pure and faithful heart. I have more to say, Dolores. Though I buy you with no jewels, still you will have finer diamonds and rubies than any other lady in the land. The Rhyssworth diamonds are considered as fine as any in Europe. You will look like a queen in them."

The girl clasped the papers in her hands more tightly.

"I would sooner have these," she said, "better than all the jewels in the world."

the western sky fell full upon his white hair as he lay asleep. Her entrance aroused him. He uttered her name, but in a tone so peculiar that she could not tell whether he had murmured it in his dream to some dead Dolores, who lived perhaps only in his memory, or to herself.

The girl went up to him with the papers in her hand. How was it that such strange thoughts and fancies haunted her? She could almost have believed that, in letters of blood on the papers, she traced the words, "The price of my life." She knelt down by the Squire's side.

I have brought you riches, papa, freedom from care, happiness, and I hope length of days to enjoy it all." She never forgot his emotion when he held the papers in his hands, while he blessed her and thanked her and praised her as few fathers have ever praised a child. She thought that after all she had done well.

After that, Lord Rhyssworth began to hurry on the day for the wedding. Why should they wait? He was his own master; he had no friends to consult; and, if the Squire did not object, who else should?

"I have waited long enough for a wife, Dolores," he said; "and now that I have a most beautiful one promised to me, why should I delay? Come and make my home bright for me."

She had no reasonable excuse to defer the wedding, nor did she seek any; so the day for the ceremony was settled.

"Who will be your bridesmaids, Dolores?" asked Lord Rhyssworth one day, when they were discussing the wedding.

She looked up at him in wondering surprise.

"Bridesmaids!" she repeated. "I have forgotten all about them."

He seized her hand and almost crushed it in his passionate clasp.

to weep tears of envy myself."
"Do you know," cried Sir Karl, impetuously, "that I can never tell when you are jesting and when you are serious?"
"And do you know, Sir Karl, that I do not even know myself? The wise man says, 'Know thyself.' I should think there is no girl living who knows herself less than I do. I am never sure of myself. I am a mass of contradictions. I have good impulses—feel sure of that—but I do not carry them out. I have lofty aspirations too, and there are times when I long to do great deeds."

Sir Karl began to have an unpleasant kind of feeling that she cared for him more than he liked. He tried to put the idea from him at first, tried to laugh at it; but it was in vain—the uncomfortable conviction grew daily. She said so many things upon which he could put but one interpretation.

No woman, he argued with himself, however, would ever show any open preference for a man. He must surely be mistaken. He thought at times that the wisest precaution would be not to go to Beaulieu, and resolved to be on his guard against Lola de Ferras. But he had yet to learn how clever a woman can be when she has an object in view.

Notwithstanding his resolve not to go to Beaulieu without very urgent reasons, every day Lola found some excuse to request his presence. Madame de Ferras had had some slight difficulty with the local board, and at Lola's suggestion she had appealed to Sir Karl for his help, which he had cheerfully given her; but he now found that it necessitated frequent interviews with madame.

So it happened that, on the day when she received the invitation to Dolores' wedding he felt a strange, inexplicable aversion for her.

"You are in no hurry to go away," she said to him, "sit down and let us discuss this affair. Shall I accept the invitation or not?"

"The capacities in this case are very limited," she laughed. "There are but four—father, bridegroom, best man, and guest. The last character is the only one in which you could appear. Are you going in that?"

"No," he answered, gloomily, "not even if I should be invited—and that is not very likely."

"Then I shall lose all interest in the wedding, and the wedding festivities will be dreary enough. Why will you not go, Sir Karl?"

"I am not invited; even if I were I should not go, as I have said."

"Not if I urged it?" she interogated, archly.

"No, not even then," he replied, hastily.

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consoling words; but he reflected that any show of sympathy to her might be dangerous; and so they remained in silence for some minutes, until Lola had regained her composure.

When she spoke to him next it was in a quiet, matter-of-fact way, all emotion, all agitation had vanished. She perceived at once that if she was to win him it must not be in that fashion.

"You are not thinking of going yet, Sir Karl," she said—"not just yet, I hope?"

"It will take me some little time to get my affairs in order," he replied; "but I shall go as soon as I can."

"We shall see you again, shall we not? I should like to give you one or two commissions in Paris, if you will accept them."

"I shall be well pleased to render you any service," he answered; and to himself he added, "except that of falling in love with you."

"Thank you. It is seldom we have a chance of getting anything from there. The name of De Ferras is proverbial in France. I will write out the list for you."

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"They are scarce enough, mamma," answered the girl, with a careless laugh. "I am sure that amongst our friends the bores outnumber the pleasant ones. Sir Karl is decidedly an agreeable companion. He understands one without the trouble of entering into a long explanation. Before I speak he very often seems to know what I am going to say."

"That is the quick intuition of sympathy," returned madame. "There are persons who hardly need to exchange two words; they seem to read each other's minds at a glance. When does Sir Karl go, Lola?" she added.

"He did not tell me. He said that he should not be here for the wedding festivities; and, as Dolores is to be married in a few weeks now, he will go soon, I should think."

Madame de Ferras had often said to herself that the master of Scarsdale was above all other men, and one she should choose for her daughter's husband. She liked his straightforward manner and his nobility of character.

"I would grieve to see, however, she would say to herself, for even my beautiful France, if I could leave my daughter in charge of a husband like Sir Karl."

She had never said anything about it to Lola; but this had been one of the greatest desires of her life, and most probably she had had the reason why she had sent for Lola to give her advice on every imaginable subject. She had begun to believe and hope that her wishes would be fulfilled; Sir Karl seemed always so happy and amused when in company with Lola.

"Perhaps," she said to herself, "I would grieve to see, however, she would say to herself, for even my beautiful France, if I could leave my daughter in charge of a husband like Sir Karl."

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TWELVE PAGES

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