

LOLA CRAWSHAY
 BY MARCHMONT, BA
 AUTHOR OF "MISER MOADLEY'S SECRET," "THE MYSTERY OF REDGROVE STRANGE," "BY WHOSE HAND," "THE OLD MILL MYSTERY," ETC., ETC., ETC.
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"All" echoed Lola, as if moved by the word into some warmth. "You mean that is not, so far as he is concerned. And what of me? Have you thought of me once in all this—what my feelings will be? Or do you think, as he seems to think, that I am merely something to remain unconsidered, unesteemed, uncared for; something for you to come and examine and test and approve or disapprove; some cold and feelingless thing, to be placed under the microscope of your family pride? You may forget, though I do not, that my father's family is as old and as honorable as your own, and that we do not recognize your right to precedence in any one respect save only a title and a fortune."

Despite her prejudice Lady Walcote could not help admiring the girl for her pride and courage.

"I know your family tree better than you probably, and I have never questioned the past history of it," she said.

"You mean you question only myself as the present member of it, and my father because he was driven abroad. But was there never a dark page in the history of your own family? Has every one of your son's ancestors been as good and true a man as himself? I do not want to pain you with unpleasant stories of the past. Enough that I ask whether your son is worse on account of the character and ill deeds and wild extravagance of his grandfather?" She had gathered this from the little secret history which her father had written for her guidance, and it was easy to see how the shot told on Lady Walcote.

"You have your father's daring, Lola," she said, using the Christian name for the first time.

"There is much of my poor dear father in me, I know," said Lola, allowing her manner to soften as she came to what she meant to be the turning point of the interview, "and, frankly, I would not have it otherwise. You and those in England know one side of his character, I another. I know he was wild; that he gambled, drank, cared nothing for religion and committed a crime which drove him to exile. In all that he was what the world calls bad. But a truer man, a stancher friend, a kinder father, he could not have been. In all his troubles, in all his riotous living, in all his wildness, he had never a harsh thought or unkind word for me. You are right in thinking I am not as your girls here in England. I have lived at times the wild bohemian life to which he was driven, and I never had a mother to stand between me and the rougher side of it. But from the hour when I left the convent school at Amiens—from choice, for often he wanted me to leave him and come to England, but he was the only thing that had loved me and I had loved, and I could not leave him in his old age—from the first to the last he watched and guarded and cared for me with a love that all my life long must make his name a sweet sound in my ears."

Her voice trembled as she spoke the last words, and she paused and then resumed, speaking with sudden impetuosity:

"Do you blame me? Do you say the daughter was wrong to prefer to stay by the father's side at the risk of her future in England? Well, if you do, I cannot help it. I would do it again only too cheerfully if I could bring him from his lonely Swiss grave. I am not of the cold, callous natures that love and hate where expediency points and judgment suggests. I love because I love, rashly, wildly, madly may be, but at least I do not forget who and what I am or what the honor of my family demands."

"Do you love my son?" asked Lady Walcote suddenly.

At the question Lola was like one moved by an overpowering rush of tempestuous emotion, which swept over her, carrying before it all the checks and bars of restraint which she had imposed upon herself. Her eyes filled with light, she flushed and then paled instantly. Her fingers were interlaced with strenuous force, and her lips were rigidly pressed, while her nostrils dilated with the fitful gusts in which her breath passed and repassed from her heaving bosom. Then she appeared to fight down her feelings and gradually to recover self possession. When she spoke, it was calmly and harshly.

"It was a magnificent piece of acting, and it lulled even the sharp suspicions of Lady Walcote.

"I will not listen to that question if you please, Lady Walcote. Young as I am, my experience has told me that love alone cannot give happiness in marriage. I will not marry your son without your consent, and on that I pledge you my word."

"My dear, I believe I have wronged you," said the old lady, rising as she spoke and kissing the girl's forehead.

And without saying more she went home.

When Lola was alone in her own room and the door was locked that no one might even see her face, she let some of her natural feelings show there.

"It was a bold stroke," she muttered, smiling. "But what then?" She vented a little oath in French. "What is a pledge more or less? If it wins her round, so much the better. If it doesn't, it is easy to break it. But I'll make her pay the price—when I'm Lady Walcote and she's the dowager."

"T" she laughed.

ght to be on the stage after all. Pierre was wrong to stop me. I won-

der"—she stopped and her face darkened—"I wonder if he is alive after all. Well, it's the fortune of war." And she tossed up her hand with a defiant gesture. "He's not likely to find me. He'll certainly never look for me as Lady Walcote, and if he finds me—bah! what then? I am not afraid, and, as for the two men, they must settle it for themselves. But, dead or alive, he shall not alter my plans by a hair's breadth. Heigho, if these good people did but know!"

And she laughed again.

CHAPTER IV.
AN EXPLANATION.

It would be difficult to analyze precisely Lady Walcote's feelings as, leaning back in her carriage and thinking closely, she was driven back to Walcote. While she had been with Lola she had yielded to the impulse of faith which the girl had stirred, but as soon as she was alone and her old doubts recurred she began to look searchingly at all that Lola had said.

It was in its effects then that Lola's cleverness in giving the pledge not to marry without Lady Walcote's consent



The old lady looked piercingly at Lola.

was proved. It was difficult to accept the promise as anything but a proof of the girl's complete good faith, and as this it prevailed with Lady Walcote.

She had gone to the interview convinced of Lola's deceit and with a strong belief that, if only she could strip off the veil, a past more or less compromising would be seen, but the interview had changed much of this opinion, and again in this the girl's shrewdness had been great.

She had not attempted to make herself too white. She had painted her past as having its evil associations and connections with which she would necessarily be brought in contact. Her plea was that she had not been injured in the contact. Had she pleaded that there was no sort of guile in her past Lady Walcote would have rejected the plea without a word, but the implication that there was much temptation to do wrong and the plea that she had been kept from it by the thought of the honor of her family had gone straight home to one in whom the pride of race was like a religion.

Another effect of the interview was to convince Lady Walcote that if Jaffray loved Lola his love was returned to the full as passionately, and this had appealed naturally to the mother's heart, softening her judgment of Lola.

She regretted the affair as much as ever. She did not believe that Jaffray would find half so much happiness with Lola as with Beryl, and she would have cut off her right hand to have him marry Beryl instead of Lola, but the sting of her opposition was gone because the reasons for it were changed.

Sir Jaffray saw this almost as soon as he met his mother at the carriage door and gave her his arm into the house.

"Well, mother?" he asked as eagerly almost as a boy.

"What I say will not stop you, Jaffray, I know. You are set on this marriage, and I can see in it disaster as plainly as I can see Lola's beauty." He noticed the use of the Christian name and was pleased. "If you do what I wish, you will not marry her."

"And if I cannot think as you do?" he asked.

"I shall not stand in the way any longer."

"I am glad"—he began, but she interrupted him at once.

"Don't misunderstand me. I am as much opposed to it as ever, but since seeing Lola I have changed some of my thoughts. I dread the marriage and fear the consequences, but you shall not find me otherwise than ready to try to welcome your wife, even if my heart is full of foreboding."

"I am glad," said Sir Jaffray quietly, and he kissed her.

It was not a very auspicious consent, but Sir Jaffray was satisfied. He knew how strongly his mother had desired the marriage with Beryl and how hard she always fought against giving way in any much cherished project. He was pleased also at the thought that Lola had thus won her round from what seemed an uncompromising and invincible resistance.

"And Beryl, mother?" he added after a pause.

"I will see her myself," said Lady Walcote. "And now that you have condescended in all"—she smiled sadly—"let me go."

He opened the door of the room where they had stood, and as she passed he said:

"I know all that this means to you, mother. I shall never forget it all my

life."

She answered with a smile and a glance laden with love, but yet sad.

When he was alone, he became thoughtful and restless, and after wandering through the house and round the stables he had his horse out and set out for a hard gallop across country—an old habit.

He met his mother again at dinner and was sorry to notice a kind of reserve between them. Neither mentioned the name of either of the girls who formed the subject of the thoughts of both until the end of dinner, when, as Lady Walcote was leaving the table, she said:

"I have written to Beryl, Jaffray, thinking you would like the thing settled at once and not feeling equal to a journey to Torquay."

"I am glad. You are as thoughtful as usual," he said. Then, as if seeking her opinion, he added, "I was thinking of going back to Torquay."

The old lady paused.

"It might be a trial to you both, but if you could have some sort of explanation it would smooth the future, and Beryl is very dear to me."

On that he resolved to go, and that Beryl might have warning of his coming and so avoid an interview if she pleased, he wrote a little note to Mrs. De Witt, saying that he proposed to return to Torquay on the following day and that if they were not staying or had other plans she had better wire him in the morning. There was no telegram by noon the next day, however, and he started with questionable anticipations of his talk with Beryl.

One effect of his letter to Mrs. De Witt he had not counted on. She thought that the letter to her came as a result of their friendship, and she met him alone at the station.

"I'm glad you've come back, Magog," she said. "I thought you would. I had to use my wits, though, to get rid of Beryl—those innocents are always such sticklers—but I've done it. Your letter was quite a stroke of genius." She laughed and flashed at him a look which she meant as a signal of her pleasure.

"Do you mean that Beryl has gone away?" asked Sir Jaffray.

"How stupid you are all of a sudden! What do you suppose I meant? What else did you mean me to do but to send her away when you wrote about 'changing plans'? You didn't want her here, I suppose, did you?"

"I see," he answered, with a good natured smile, "you wanted a cozy time." He let none of his vexation appear.

"I've had none of you during the whole time we've been here," she replied, with an aggrieved air.

He made no such answer as she had wished, and this annoyed her, and they walked a little way in silence. When they reached the promenade, they sat down, and Sir Jaffray, who was in doubt whether Beryl's having left might not, after all, mean that she had wished to avoid an interview with him, and that while Mrs. De Witt thought she had got rid of Beryl the latter had in reality been glad to go, tried to find this out.

"When did Beryl go?" he asked.

"Oh, Beryl, Beryl, Beryl! It's nothing but Beryl with you," was the testy rejoinder. "Early this afternoon, as soon as I could get rid of her."

"Did she know I was coming?"

"Oh, the conceit of you men! Of course she did and said that after the disgusting way you flirted with Lola she would have nothing more to do with you."

She laughed again at this.

"You laugh savagely, as if you wished that was true. I see she didn't know. All right."

"When I want a good time, I'm not quite dull enough to ask all the world to come and take a hand. I hate three handed whist. You can ask her to play—when she's your wife."

"Then she'll never play at all."

"Then it is true, after all, is it, and Lola gets the odd trick?" cried Mrs. De Witt, looking up quickly. "I thought so two nights ago. Tell me all about it. But how about Beryl?"

Sir Jaffray smiled at her eagerness.

"You've called me an 'odd trick,' and I'm not sure that that's a compliment," he said.

"Bah! You men are all card tricks to us. Some we win, some we don't, some we throw away, and some we can't hope to get. A good many we win by bluffing and finessing, and some are snapped up because we are fools enough to revoke. But it's a compliment to be called the odd trick—that's what we're all fighting to get."

"Are you fighting to get me?"

"Haven't I maneuvered now to get you alone here, and aren't you in about the most objectionable and uncomfortable mood possible? You're not a bit worth fighting about, and you're not fit for anything but to be married."

"You're a bit put out," he answered, adding, after a pause: "I'm glad I came over, because we ought to have a word or two to put matters straight. Of course it must make a change in things."

"You mean your engagement with Lola?"

"Yes."

"Under the circumstances I wonder you came," she replied crossly.

"I came to see Beryl."

"I think you're very horrid," she rapped out irritably. "That means that I'm not only in the way, but that I've acted the part of marplot in stopping or postponing a most interesting explanation between you two. I think I'd better go to my hotel." And she got up from her seat and rustled her dress angrily.

"I'm sorry you take it badly," said Sir Jaffray. "But you must see that something of the kind had to be done. Things couldn't go on."

"I don't know what you mean by 'things,'" she said crossly. "Marriage needn't make a man a boor—before it happens. There's plenty of time afterward for all that. Of course I can quite understand your wanting to train for an Arcadian existence, and you can't begin too soon. But you needn't start

by bludgeoning every woman you've known while you haven't lived in Arcady."

"Sorry you've taken it like this. We've been good friends, little woman, and I've many a thing to thank you for."

After a long silence Mrs. De Witt said suddenly:

"I must have seemed to take it very seriously, I'm afraid. But remember I'm only a woman, and when we lose the odd tricks it's not only that we're vexed at losing them, but angry with those who have won them from us."

"That's all right, but then you and I could never play anything else but double dummy all our lives, and that's not a riotously lively game."

"But it's sometimes safer than when the cards are not on the table," she retorted, adding, after a forced laugh and in a changed voice: "I think I'm glad, Magog, after all. I do really. She's a magnificent creature and as clever as she's beautiful. That's praise from a woman. And if you'd only told me what you wanted and meant I could have helped you. And really, under the circumstances, I'm sorry that I sent Beryl off today before you came, though if she knew of this she may have jumped at the chance I gave her of getting away rather than stay and see you. You don't expect her to like it, of course."

Sir Jaffray thought there was more naturalness in her manner than he had ever noticed before. This pleased him, and when they reached the hotel they shook hands and parted better friends than ever, perhaps, so far as he was concerned.

He was glad to have had the opportunity of the conversation, and as he leaned back in the railway carriage on his return journey the incident suggested to him the changes in his life which his marriage with Lola would make.

He had drifted into the friendship with Mrs. De Witt, and on his side the relations had never got as far as even the mildest flirtation. He had been glad to go to her house when in town and had been amused more than anything else to watch her develop a habit of monopolizing him. He had been quite keen enough to read her and quick enough to avoid anything like a compromising complication.

Never before had she made such an effort at direct flirtation as in the case of this arrangement to get him to herself for a time at Torquay, and he smiled as he thought how she had thus been paid out by her own coin and left alone as the result of her over-zeal.

He had meant to drop the more pronounced friendship as soon as his engagement was certain, and he knew that there must be some kind of explanation. "Things couldn't go on," as he had said, and he was glad that the matter was over so easily.

As to Beryl, he was by no means so satisfied. It was true that, so far as the idea of a marriage was concerned, he



She met him alone at the station.

had been forced into it largely by the actions of others, but at the same time the thought of causing Beryl sorrow and trouble was one which distressed him grievously. They had been stanch, true friends from childhood, and in many ways she had been like a sister to him.

She was, moreover, such a clever, sympathetic and ready witted girl that at one time the prospect of a life companionship with her had been full of pleasure to him. Many of the incidents of their comradeship recurred to him, and he was sensible of a feeling of regret that in the future the relations would have to be different. He hoped that Lola and Beryl would be friends, and he tried to persuade himself that by his mother's influence this might be the case, but the hope was at best a faint one.

When his thoughts slipped the meshes of these light entanglements, however, and went to Lola, there was nothing in them but the passionate confidence of the absorbed and devoted lover, and he wove a thousand fancies with the brightest colored skeins which the glowing desires of passion could select.

He did not reach home until the early hours of the morning, having to drive a long distance across country from Braxton, the main line station at which the express stopped, and, of course, saw no one. When he went down late on the following morning, Lady Walcote came to him, and saying that she had had a letter from Beryl, who had returned home suddenly, handed him one from her addressed to him. It was not long, but it had cost the girl much to write it:

MY DEAR JAFFRAY—The mother's news about you has not surprised me in the least. I have been using my eyes and ears, and my chief feeling was a little regret that somehow you had suddenly thought it not worth while to consult me. You ought to have known how, as a woman, I should be longing to take a part, and, as a friend, should be most anxious to help you in finding happiness. I wish you with all my heart. Your affectionate cousin,
 BERYL LEVYESTER.

"She is a good sort," said Sir Jaffray, handing the letter to his mother, who read it quickly.

"Yes. It would be difficult to find a more sensible girl than Beryl."

"I'll see her today," answered the

CHAPTER V.
"MY NAME IS TURMAN—PIERRE TURMAN."

Beryl had not written the letter of congratulation to her cousin without a considerable struggle.

She did not like and did not trust Lola, and she had noticed in her many things that had sharpened this distrust.

She had at one time seen a great deal of Lola, as Mrs. Villiers had made many efforts to bring the two girls together, and though at first Beryl had to some extent come within the influence of Lola's unquestionably attractive manner there had been no regard or real affection between them.

Quite irrespective of her own disappointment—and how deep and stinging and bitter that was no one but herself knew—Beryl was dead against the marriage. She felt that Lola did not love her, and though at first Beryl had to some extent come within the influence of Lola's unquestionably attractive manner there had been no regard or real affection between them.

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