

# LADY NORA WIDOW

BY BERTHA M. CLAY.

## CHAPTER XVII.

Murray is gone; but the sting of her ill-considered presence remains to unshy Yolande at least. She was asking for her, seeking for her company on this long, dreary mountain excursion, reminding her of the coldness and indifference of the previous evening. Her frigid-careless question this morning whether she would join him or not, she half refused, hoping that she would see her to put off her visit to Lady Maria, until Joyce Murray came to his side, and pressed her to go with them.

"Oh, yes!" mademoiselle replies briefly. It is no part of her scheme to spare Yolande's feelings. "He and Miss Murray went out an hour ago, up the hills as far as Penmawr, I believe."

"Alone?" Lady Maria asks, with a scandalized emphasis, and a warning glance at Yolande which her devoted nurse is too busy to see.

"Oh, no—at least, I think not! Miss Powys and her brother went with them," mademoiselle answers absently. "They will lunch at Penmawr, of course. There is such a delicious bread-and-cheese to be had there, and home-brewed ale, and all sorts of nice things!"

"Penmawr is five miles away," Lady Maria observes.

"Oh, yes!" mademoiselle says quietly. "They can't be back until the evening. Ten miles across the hills is no joke."

"You were afraid of the fatigue, I suppose, dear?" Lady Maria says, with an inquisitive look at Yolande.

"Yes," Yolande answers, in a dull voice. "I could not have borne it."

Discover the bare truth — with a vicious hiss — "Of the alarming news she very thoughtlessly announced to you. His lordship is not perceptibly worse, I assure your ladyship. He is a little weaker, as I told you, and Doctor Bleyce was not satisfied until Sir Gregory Parker was telegraphed for, not an hour ago. As you know, Lady Maria, I was in your room then, so I could not possibly hear the news. The Earl did not sleep well last night, and seems to be slowly but painlessly losing ground, as I told you. This information I have had freshly conveyed to me by the Earl's nurse, not five minutes since, and — I have spoken to the Viscount as well."

"Of course! Of course, Isabelle!" Lady Maria says apologetically. "I was only amazed to think that aunt Murray had any information that you had not, knowing, of course, that you repeat faithfully to me everything that the Viscount tells you."

"Of course, my lady," the meek and faithful creature says calmly.

"Of course!" repeats Lady Maria decisively. "I knew aunt Murray was exaggerating."

At this a faint swift hope dawns in Yolande's heart.

"Has Captain Glynne gone out, do you know, mademoiselle?" she asks carelessly.

"Oh, yes!" mademoiselle replies briefly. It is no part of her scheme to spare Yolande's feelings.

"Alone?" Lady Maria asks, with a scandalized emphasis, and a warning glance at Yolande which her devoted nurse is too busy to see.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

Darkness within and without, darkness all about her, darkness in her heart! Yolande Glynne, a desolate, forlorn bride, not three weeks married and already neglected by her husband, begins to realize her position, to pity herself, and to weep bitter tears about herself in girlish, heart-broken grief and anger.

But, when the long, long day wears on, and the sunning fades, and the blue skies are darkly clouded in one of April's changeful moods, and the afternoon wanes quickly, lowering skies and souging wind and chill blasts of rain betokening a wet and stormy evening, the poor little married girl's mood changes pitifully.

"The whole live-long day without one sight of his face!" This is what she is saying to herself now, as she sits in the gloaming in her chill, gloomy bed-room.

"He is not coming — not coming! Not one sign of him — for I have never taken my eyes off that bend of the carriage road beyond the trees. No sign of him yet, and it is nearly six o'clock. I have not seen him since ten this morning. He has been gone more than seven hours — all the day — he and Joyce Murray together. Oh, Dallas, Dallas, you need not insult me so cruelly and shamefully — you need not let every one see I am a poor, unloved, despoiled creature, you married for her money! Oh, Dallas, my darling, you need not degrade yourself so!"

She has been sitting there without stirring or changing her position for hours, ever since the afternoon began to wane, and she has expected the returning party from their long mountain excursion every minute.

She has left the drawing-room, where indeed she was sitting in solitary grandeur, Mrs. Murray, with cold courtesy, begged her to excuse herself from keeping her company.

"I must be in my own rooms, ready at any moment the Earl's nurse wishes to speak to me," she says vaguely, the truth being that she is keeping a close and jealous watch on mademoiselle's movements, lest she supplant her in the dying Earl's room.

Mademoiselle has been sent several times with messages to the nurse or to the Viscount, when in his father's apartments, by Lady Maria, or on behalf of Lady Maria herself, and mademoiselle stays there sometimes, and takes the nurse's place for half an hour, and sees the doctor sometimes, and knows everything, and understands everything, and is generally invaluable. But Mrs. Murray feels she could cheerfully strangle mademoiselle. The rights of birth and of old acquaintance all seem to melt away as barriers before the detestable, cunning, ubiquitous person who has not been in the house three weeks.

Lady Maria says, with ungrateful candor, that she never met any one who understood her so well as Mademoiselle Gantier. The Viscount, in his grave, sententious manner, declares that mademoiselle is "a most estimable young lady," and that her services are "peculiarly valuable to Lady Maria."

And, as she gazes earnestly, without one touch of selfish vanity, a sudden, wild, fond hope lights and flushes the marble-pale face into beauty. Would that she could see Dallas now, meet one admiring look from his eyes such as he gave her last night, hurry to his side, clasp her arms about his neck, and kiss him quickly, lest her courage should fail! Surely he has returned by this time, for she heard footsteps in the dressing room a few minutes since. And with her hands pressed tightly over her heart, to still its loud throbbing, Yolande hurries softly to the door communicating with her husband's room, and listens breathlessly.

The door is locked, but the key is on her side; and, nervously, she unlocks the door stealthily, and cautiously peeps in. There is no one there; and, trembling and laughing at herself, Yolande ventures in step by step, and gazes about her with strange interest.

It is the first time she has ever dared to enter her husband's apartment, and she is terrified now at the thought of his entering and finding her there.

Still, like poor Fatima, she lingers on and on in the Bluebeard chamber, peering about in most inquisitive fashion. Captain Glynne's man — an excellent servant of his class — has just left to dress — evening clothes and stiff, snowy shirt laid on the bed, silk socks and patent leather shoes airing near the nice bright fire, white tie, razors, and brushes on the dressing table, and a can of hot water steaming in the foot bath.

Yolande fingers the ivory brushes, touches the razors with a tremor of fear, resisting a violent longing to open one of the shining blades, peeps into the dressing case, and looks when she sees cosmetic and violet powder and macassar oil, and "brilliantine" and choice perfumes and pastes and unguents.

"Oh, you vain fellow, and you so handsome already!" she says, smiling delightedly, at her discovery. "I should so like to see Dallas waving and twisting up his moustache, and powdering and perfuming himself like a professional beauty. Oh, you bad boy!"

And the Fatima's mishap befalls this too-curious bride also, a bottle of macassar oil replacing the fatal door key. She has the bottle in her hand with the stopper out, when she catches the sound of quickly approaching steps. The bottle, heedlessly restored, without its stopper, to its place upon the table, treacherously tumbles over, and from all seem to melt away as barriers before the detestable, cunning, ubiquitous person who has not been in the house three weeks.

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Yolande, being left quite alone, and dreading Lady Maria's arrival in the drawing-room, has gone to her own grand, cheerless room, and has there shut herself in from every one. Her maid has brought her some tea at five o'clock, which she still, sitting in the window rail, lest Pitts should discover she is watching for her husband.

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ner rest — Captain Dallas Glynne, in his old favorite position, and pretty Miss Joyce Murray, with tumbled golden hair and bright flushed cheeks and softly shadowed eyes, from the healthful fatigue of their six hours' long mountain excursion together.

"We're in a disgraceful state of mud and damp, Dallas, both of us," Joyce is saying, as she lazily bends down for his cup, which he as lazily hands up to her, and then takes up the little silver tea pot on the table beside her. "It was delicious, but I'm awfully tired; aren't you? I wish dinner was an hour off!"

And then they became simultaneously aware of Yolande's presence.

CHAPTER XIX.  
She pauses but for a few seconds, in sheer surprise and bewilderment, but it is long enough. Neither Dallas Glynne nor Joyce Murray will ever forget the incident or forget her as she looked just then, graceful, elegant, disdainful, making them both for a few moments feel a little afraid of her, a little ashamed of themselves.  
Joyce was the first to recover herself with a gay laugh.  
"Oh, Mrs. Glynne!" she exclaims. "What a reproach to us! You are dressed already for dinner, and Captain Glynne and I are not fit to be seen! I was just saying how disgracefully wet and muddy we were."  
"You both seem rather oblivious of the flight of time certainly," Yolande retorts coolly; "it is a quarter to seven now."  
She experiences no feeling of anger, or excitement, or indeed emotion of any kind, beyond a stupefied feeling of dull contempt and despair — contempt for herself as well as for them, despair for her own future.  
"Your mountain walk was rather a long one, wasn't it?" she says, with a faint icy smile, looking from one to the other composedly. "I was rather anxious as to what had become of you both; but I need not have been, I see. You look care of each other. And your mother kindly assured me this morning that she had placed my husband under your guardianship for the day, Miss Murray."  
All this is said easily, smilingly, with a cold, woman-of-the-world indifference which is too careless for scorn, and which stings Dallas Glynne worse than tears or upbraiding would have done.  
"She despises me," he tells himself, "and I deserve it. It was very bad form of me to go off for the whole day with Joyce, and leave her at home! By Jove, Yolande looks this evening as if she could pay me back in my own coin! What a strange girl she is! I'm not by any means sure I quite understand her."  
And Joyce says inwardly — "How very stupid of mamma to say anything of the kind! She knows that Dallas Glynne's wife must hate me and be awfully jealous of me!"  
Then she picks up her sealskin cape and black serge toque.  
"I really must disappear now, Dallas," she says, laughing, "and I should advise you to do the same."  
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