

FOUR LETTERS

By
LILLIAN BENNET-THOMPSON

The One That He Wrote

LOS ANGELES, Cal., Sept. 27, 1901.



MY DEAR MISS GRAHAM:
I had hoped to be able to find time to see you before my departure for the west; but the sudden death of Miss Weldon's mother necessitated my leaving while you were out of town.

It is improbable that we shall meet again very soon; but I want to assure you of my sincere and lasting regard, and to wish you all happiness in the future.

I can never thank you adequately for your kindness to me during my stay in New York, nor for the great gift of your friendship. It shall be my earnest endeavor to be worthy of it always.

Faithfully yours,

JOHN DENTON EDWARDS.

The One That He Sent

LOS ANGELES, Cal., Sept. 27, 1901.

LUCIA:
You will let me call you that for the last time, will you not? And you will condone the weakness—or shall I say the cowardice?—that prompts me to write you this letter. For it is nothing less than cowardice. I meant to send you a formal note of farewell; but at the last moment, my courage deserted me. Perhaps, it would have been kinder to keep the truth from you, to let you think me a cad, who, for the sake of his own selfish vanity, would win a woman's love and then fling it away; but I can not bring myself to do that, Lucia. The thought that you would despise me is horrible to me. I want you to know the real truth, the whole truth, and, knowing, to think of me as kindly as you can.

The day after you left New York, I got a telegram from Ethel, telling me that her mother had died very suddenly and asking that I come to Los Angeles at once. Of course, I went. You would have been the first to tell me to go.

On my arrival, I found Ethel frantic with grief. I was shocked and startled by her appearance. She was pale, pitifully thin and worn, the mere shadow of her former self. It needed no very great discernment to see that she was on the verge of a mental and physical collapse. Her mother was the only relative she had in the world; she was left absolutely alone, except for a few friends—and Ethel has never had the gift of making enduring friendships.

Her joy at seeing me was pathetic; she clung to me like a little child, imploring me to forgive her for her shortcomings, begging me not to leave her. And, Lucia, I can not. I have thought it all out, tried to look at it from every point of view; and that is my decision.

With the width of a continent between us, it had seemed a simple thing for me to write and tell her that the engagement was a mistake, that we were unsuited to each other and could never be happy if we married. At least a dozen times, we quarrelled and were reconciled. When I went to New York, I believed that the engagement was permanently broken, and that she was satisfied to have it so. And then, her letter came, as one had always come, blaming her hasty temper for the misunderstanding, and assuming that everything would be as it had been between us.

How could she know that you had come into my life, filling it to the exclusion of all others?

I should have told her then. It would have been the fairest, the best thing for all of us. But instead, I wrote her that I felt we should be better apart, since, whenever we were together, we disagreed. She did not know that I loved you; she does not know it now; and, please God, she never will know it. She believes that the fault has been hers all along—and she believes that I love her.

Lucia, I can not tell her the truth. She is frail, ill; she has suffered terribly these last two months, and I think the knowledge that I love another woman would kill her. Were you and I to take our happiness, it would be over her grave; and even if it were possible for me, I know it would not be for you. And so—it is finished.

My wedding day is tomorrow. I am going to make her my wife, and to try to make her happy; and from the moment that I place the ring on her finger, I am going to devote my life to her. But today is mine—ours; and it is no disloyalty to her, or to any one, to tell you that I love you.

I loved you the first moment that I saw you, standing there in the doorway with the moonlight falling softly all about you. Your eyes met mine—do you remember?—and I felt that you were made for me and I for you. It all seemed plain sailing then; there was nothing to keep us apart. And the night when I held you in my arms, I knew that earth and heaven could hold no greater joy for me than—you. And I have lost you. I can't quite realize it yet.

You will be happy, I know. You love me; but you will love again, some one who is worthy of that priceless gift. I am not worthy; I never was. But I would have tried to make you happy, Lucia, and I think I should not have failed utterly. You will forget me. You are too big, too strong to allow this to influence your life for ill. Perhaps, sometimes, you will write to me and say that all goes well with you.

It is useless for me to tell you what it has cost me to give you up. You know. But I have done the only thing that I could do; I have decided as you would have had me decide. There was no other way.

We shall meet again some time; and then, I want to be able to look into those clear, grave eyes of yours and read there the knowledge that though I have lost your love, I have not forfeited your friendship. It is just that hope that has helped me to do my duty, made it possible for me to play the part Fate has given me.

Dear, it's good-bye now. I never thought to say it to you. If only I could have told you all this, face to face, and received the assurance that you understood! I have put it so badly, so baldly; but, Lucia, I can not seem to think of anything tonight except that you can never, any more, be to me what you have been.

I'm bound; tied hand and foot. For a boyish love-affair, I must pay by making the greatest sacrifice—giving you up. The worst of it all is that I know you will suffer. I could bear my own pain cheerfully; but I have in-

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