

**MRS. KEITH'S CRIME.
A RECORD. IN TWO
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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Mrs. Keith's Crime. A Record. In Two Volumes. Vol. I by Lucy Clifford

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LUCY CLIFFORD

**MRS. KEITH'S CRIME.
A RECORD. IN TWO
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

MRS. KEITH'S CRIME.

A Record.

"O Wedding-Guest! this soul has been
Alone on a wide, wide sea."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1885.

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to
M. D. W.

MRS. KEITH'S CRIME.

It would be useless to try to account for the manner in which this history came to be written down. It is obvious that Mrs. Keith's hand could not have written it, nor could her voice have given it utterance, and there was none by her in that hour when love gave her terrible strength, and left her to brave eternity. It seems almost as if, as she passed along, the air itself bore witness and the wind swept into the heart of one who understood, all the unspoken thoughts of that passionate life.

CHAPTER I.

It cannot be true; it must be fancy. The child is growing, has grown too fast, is delicate,

and he did not know what to say, and yet he looked so grave when he heard that my mother and sister had both long ago died of consumption. "It often skips a generation, and then shows itself again," he said, and he seemed sorry for us when he said good-bye.

If anything happened to Molly I should go mad—to Molly, the little one who came six months after her father died; Molly, with the strange longing that half frightens me written in her eyes, a longing that perhaps only years hence I shall learn to understand;—to Molly, who is more than half the living world to me. More than half, I say, for there is Jack; and a bonnie boy is Jack, going on for eight years old. He has sturdy legs, and wide-open blue eyes, and a crop of golden hair. But my heart has never ached for him as it has for Molly, and love has no bands that bind so fast and close as those that fear and sorrow weave. If Molly dies—— But I dare not think of it, for I can face nothing, can go on no longer, if that is to be. After all, we have only a certain

amount of courage in us, and mine was all used up in past days ; there is none left for this.

How cruel it seems. I sit down and try to think over the years since Molly's father died. They are only a few, after all, and yet how long a time they seem. You know how it all came about, how happy we were, how in an hour the whole world changed. It is maddening to remember it—the summer morning and the sunshine ; and the laughter of the children on the beach ; and his last words, " I shall not be long, my darling. Go home and wait for me. You are tired." I got up and went home, turning, as I stood on the steps, to take another look at the sea—the sea that was killing him even while I looked, and laughed, and felt so happy ; and then I waited for him just as he had told me. They carried him back. I can hear the slow tramp, tramp of their feet now, and see the water dropping from his hair and the cloth with which they had covered him. There he lay, he who but