

# LOVE.

—BY—  
ABI. S. JACKMAN.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.—Continued.

"Hush, man!" the doctor said, his face pale with horror. "How can you jest when you are dying?"

"Well, I murdered him, and now I will get my punishment for it," he answered calmly. "But I can stand it," and reaching out one hand, he gasped;

"Let me sign it—quick, for I am dying!"

They placed the pen in his already stiffening fingers, and with an effort he wrote his name, and then fell back dead, the blood gushing in torrents from his nose and mouth.

Sir Lionel turned away, sick at heart, and as he entered the room where his wife lay sleeping her long, last sleep, it seemed to him as if a happy smile lingered about the cold lips.

The next morning the whole country was astir when it became known that the beautiful woman who had been languishing in prison, and who was condemned to die, had been released, and there was great rejoicing.

Gabrielle herself was calmer of them all. When Sir Lionel took her hand in his, and led her to the side of the beautiful dead, she placed one hand upon the marble brow, and said quietly:

"Ah, Lionel, if I were only in her place!"

"No, no!" he answered, clasping her hand again. "You must not say that, Gabrielle, you have yet all to live for, and—"

"Hush," she said, putting one hand over her lips—"hush, Lionel!"

She bowed her head and kissed the icy lips, whispering low:

"Good-bye, dear, good-bye! You spoke truly when you said that you would never see me again."

She walked quietly from the room, and as Sir Lionel saw the graceful figure vanish, he little dreamed that it would be long, long years before he would see her again.

No one saw her as she stole softly away, and a few hours later, upon the deck of an outward bound steamer, a slender form stood, and through her tears, saw the shores of bonny old England fade slowly from her sight, while she said with a sob:

"A new life lies before me. What does it hold for me, joy or sorrow?"

But the roll of the waves was the only answer to her query, and the future was hidden from her tired eyes.

In the meantime, Lord Thorndyke and Sir Lionel were searching high and low for the lost one, but in vain.

They did not find a single trace of her, and at last, in despair, they gave up all hopes of ever finding her.

Where was she? Where had she gone, vanishing as completely as though she had been swallowed up by the great sea that moaned both day and night?

Whenever Sir Lionel saw a lovely flower-like face or a bronze-crowned head, he turned and looked after it with a sigh, wondering where his lost darling was.

But the months sped swiftly by, and she was not found, but he never gave up the search, but ah, how weary grew the long waiting!

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

"I HAVE SUFFERED ENOUGH. TAKE ME IN YOUR STRONG ARMS, MY LOVE, AND HOLD ME THERE THROUGH ALL TIME AND ETERNITY!"

Night, dark, gloomy and desolate, was falling over the city of New York. A fine misty rain was beginning to come down like needles of steel, and the street-lamps glowed faintly through the fog, as if they were discouraged in their efforts to shine forth and brighten the general dreariness of the night itself.

A slender, dark-robed figure was toiling along one of the cheerless, dirty streets in the poorer quarter of the city, and as she passed under the street-lamp, its sickly rays shone full upon the pale, sad face of Gabrielle Thorndyke.

She was poorly clad, and there was a world of sorrow and misery in her great, dark eyes that told how bitterly she had suffered. Ah, how she was changed! She was no longer the lovely young girl who had knelt beside the crystal lake in old England so long ago, and gazing down into its silvery depths, prayed that love might come to her; nor did she resemble at all the beautiful Princess Cordonia, who had wealth and power and all that the human heart could ask for. Love had come to her, and so had sorrow, and the result was to be read in her despairing eyes.

She halted before a dingy-looking brick house, past whose door the noisy street-cars rumbled, and with a deep sigh, drew forth a key and let herself in, going up a flight of stairs that creaked dismally at every step. At the top of the landing she once more applied the key, and then she was in her own apartment, which consisted of a single room, serving as parlor, dining-room, sleeping-room and kitchen all in one. The small apartment was neat and tidy, although poorly furnished, but oh, what a home for one who had been used to every luxury that money could procure! Even the gypsy camp among the

mountains had been a palace when compared to this, for there was plenty of fresh air, and at night the whisper of the fragrant trees lulled her to rest, and the blue sky smiled down over her couch, sealing her tired eyes with a star.

She removed her faded hat and shawl, and sat down in the only rocking-chair that the room boasted, leaning her head upon one thin hand while the tears rolled slowly down her pale cheek.

"Two years!" she whispered, choking back a sob. "Two long years since I last looked upon his face! Has he forgotten me, I wonder? Have they all given me up for dead? Ah, me! how I have suffered in those years, only the dear Lord knows! I have tried to be patient, and atone for my sin, but at times it has been so hard—so hard!"

She bowed her head upon the rough table and sobbed aloud. Poor, weary, heartsick Gabrielle! She had borne enough in those two years to atone for all sins, and yet her heart longed so for her lover that at times she wondered why she did not die. Night after night she had lain on her bed, praying to forget, and yet ever before her eyes arose the smiling face of the one she loved so well, and with a shudder of painful delight she recalled the passionate kisses branded upon face, neck and brow by that same tender mouth, and she would cry out for him to come back to her, for God help her, she could not forget! She would whisper that if he would come to her for just one little hour and kiss her eyes to blindness, then she would be willing to die!

It all rushed over her as she sat there, and lifting her head with a cry of stifled pain, she whispered:

"I have tried to forget by helping others forget their sorrows, but my efforts have all been in vain. Oh, what a relief death would be! But I suppose I must wait and be patient!"

Among the poor in that locality, Mrs. Noble, as she was known, was looked upon as little less than an angel. She it was who cared for the old and helpless and nursed the sick, and when there was no money with which to pay doctor's bills, and now and then buy a shroud or coffin—from her own scanty purse, she supplied all. Such acts of mercy and kindness helped to heal her broken heart, and bring forgetfulness if but for a little while.

There came a soft tap at the door, and with a sigh she arose and opened it. A small, thinly-clad girl stood there, shivering, a look of fright on her face, but the kindly smile with which she was greeted, drove away all fears, and in a piping voice she said:

"If you please, Mrs. Noble, a woman sent me after you. She is awful sick, and she wants me to bring you with me. Will you go?"

"Yes, I will go with you," she answered, and donning her worn hat and shawl once more, she followed the girl down the stairs and into the street.

Her small guide conducted her through several dark streets and lanes, and finally ushered her into a miserable tenement, leading her down a pair of rickety steps into a damp, dark cellar.

At first she could see nothing, and then as her eyes became used to the darkness, she beheld the figure of a woman, stretched out on a bed of rags over in one corner of the wretched den, and she could hear her moans of agony every now and then.

"I am glad you have come," she said hoarsely, and to Gabrielle there seemed to be a familiar ring in her voice. "For I am dying, and my life has been one long career of sin and folly. I cannot right those whom I have wronged, but I can make a confession to you, and that will ease my guilty conscience."

She turned her ghastly face toward Gabrielle, and as she did so, a cry burst from the girl's lips, and she started back in dismay, for there before her in rags and filth, and dying alone, lay the gypsy queen!

"You!" she cried, shrinking back—"you!"

"Yes, it is I"—the dying queen went on—"I, the most wretched, miserable creature in all the world, but in spite of that I am your mother, and I am dying!"

Like a flash the memory of her cruel treatment at the hands of this woman who was her mother, rushed like a whirlwind through her brain, and for the moment she drew back, and then, as if ashamed of her own weakness, she laid one hand upon the cold brow, already touched by Death's icy fingers, and said gently:

"You have only a few hours to live, and it is best that you should make your peace with God. Those whom you have wronged, you cannot help now, and it is all past and gone. We have all sinned—we all have need of mercy, and—and you are my mother!"

She uttered that last word in a low, stifled voice, as though it was a very hard task, and yet she leaned down and laid one hand very gently on the dying woman's brow.

"I do not deserve kind words from you," the queen answered with a groan. "Oh, God! if I could only live my wasted life over again! But I cannot, oh I cannot!"

"It is too late to think of the past now," Gabrielle answered softly. "Think only of the future, and repent in time, for it has been said that repentance makes the human heart even better and braver than it was before it sinned. Think of that and be comforted."

"God will not listen to a sinner like me who repents only at the last moment!" the grief-stricken woman wailed.

"He will listen to any one of His children who repents," was the low reply. "No matter how much they may have sinned, He is always loving and forgiving," and then, while her breath came thick and fast, she asked suddenly:

"You are dying now, and surely in your last hour you will tell me the sacred truth. Are you my mother?"

"I am your mother," was the slow reply. "But, oh, dear God! what a mother!"

A groan burst from Gabrielle's lips, and she buried her face in her hands. She had hoped against hope for so long!

"Does—does your father know that I still live?" faintly asked the dying woman, and her eyes burned with an eager, restless fire.

"No, he thinks you are dead," Gabrielle answered, her voice trembling. "He believes that you were drowned years and years ago when you first left him."

"Better so," was the feeble reply. "Better so, and you will never reveal to him the truth? Promise me that you will never let him know how and where I died!" and she turned and grasped Gabrielle's fingers in her thin hands. "Remember I am dying, and in spite of all my sins and follies, I am your mother!"

"I will never tell him," was the slow answer. "He shall never know."

A smile crept about the pale lips, and then she turned her fast-glazing eyes upon that beautiful, patient face beside her and a look that must have come from heaven, lit up her own face. All that was good and noble and true in her nature shone forth from her sunken eyes, and she was a mother indeed! Sins were hers, but for the moment she was a true mother, smiling upon her child. The weak lips moved, and the girl kneeling beside her caught the faint words:

"Good-bye and God bless you, my dear child!"

With a wild sob, Gabrielle threw herself down beside the frail form sobbing:

"Oh, mother, mother!"

That sacred name was the last sound that met the ears of the dying woman, and with one gentle sigh she closed her eyes and her spirit passed upward to a kind and merciful God. She, who had wrecked a husband's life, and for years ruled the lawless gypsy band was dead!

Gabrielle arose, her face pale and set, and to the girl who entered the room she said:

"I will send the undertaker to care for the body. Remain here until he comes."

She crossed the poor, thin hands that once had hurled cruel stones at her, over the pulseless breast, and then bending low kissed the cold lips and left the dead sleeping that long, dreamless sleep that knows no waking.

Like one whose brain is dazed she returned to her cheerless room, her eyes dim with unshed tears, and entered. Some one was there before her, and he arose from the chair where he was sitting, the lamplight falling upon his fair hair, turning it into living, burning gold.

"Gabrielle, Gabrielle, my darling," he cried, and the next moment she was folded in his arms, while he covered her sweet face with burning kisses.

"Lionel, am I dreaming?" she sobbed, nestling close to his breast, and then as she looked up into his eyes, and saw the tender light in their blue depths, she whispered:

"I have suffered enough. Take me in your strong arms, my love, and hold me through all time and eternity!"

"I will, sweetheart," he answered passionately. "I will never let you go from me again. I have searched for you all over the world, and I have followed you across the silvery sea that seemed to tell me where you were. And now, my darling, you are mine to have and to hold for evermore, for to-night sees us man and wife!"

"Ah, Lionel!" she whispered, leaning her head against his breast. "I am happy at last! I have sinned and I have suffered! I have borne the tortures of hell itself, and yet I lived through it, knowing that if I could feel your kiss on my lips just once, it would be ample recompense for it all! Away down in my heart a tiny, silvery voice kept singing, and its song was one sweet word. Can you guess my king, what that word was?"

He gazed into her tender eyes, and with a shower of burning kisses, answered: "Love!"

## [THE END]

Daniel Kellher.

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