

# LOVE.

—BY—  
ABI. S. JACKMAN.

## CHAPTER XVII.—Continued.

"So this is what I rescued you from a band of roving gypsies for?" he said, his voice low and terrible to hear. "This is my reward. My name forever disgraced, and the life of a man whose love you possess, ruined. You have been a living lie from the very hour that I looked upon your face in that wood among the mountains of Colorado, and you have allowed this marriage to go on when you knew that you were sinning against God and all who loved you. I can never forgive you, and after to-night you are no longer a child of mine, for as God is my judge, I will never again look upon your face. I will see that you do not suffer, but I can never forgive you for what you have done. God be merciful to you, and farewell."

He turned, and was about to leave the room, but Lady Ethel sprang forward, and laying one hand upon his arm cried: "My lord, I beg of you, do not go. Let her speak for herself, and all may be well yet. Oh, it cannot be true. There is some fearful mystery beneath it all. Gabrielle darling, speak and save yourself."

She took the slight figure in her arms, and kissed the sad lips, her own tears falling like rain, sobbing aloud, and crying out that Gabrielle was being cruelly wronged, and she must save her.

"Speak to her, Sir Lionel," she cried, her tear-wet eyes fastened upon his handsome face. "Oh, speak just one kind word. Surely you, her lover, do not condemn her and turn away from her when she loves you and needs you so much."

"Hush, dear," Gabrielle said, sadly. "It is all true. There is no mystery, no mistake. I am his wife, God pity me, and there is no use to ask mercy for me."

I do not deserve it. I have sinned, and my sin has found me out. But I did not do it willingly. It was through love that was stronger than sense of honor, deeper than fear of death. And—here she threw back her beautiful head, and smiled—"although it has ended in sorrow and disgrace, yet I have lived, lived, lived."

She looked at Sir Lionel, who had not moved since she said she was the gypsy's wife, and her heart gave a bound of love. An instant later she was kneeling before him, her clasped hands uplifted, her lips quivering piteously.

"Lionel," she pleaded like a little grieved child. "Oh, Lionel, my love! look at me and forgive me. I am going out of your life forever to-night, dear, and surely you can spare me one kind glance. I am not the first woman who has sinned for love, Lionel, nor will I be the last. Look at me just once, dear, only once is all I ask."

He looked down at her, as she knelt before him in her bridal robes, and his heart seemed to be slowly breaking. How he loved her, oh dear Heaven! how he loved her!

"Gabrielle!" he groaned in bitter anguish, drops of torture standing out upon his brow. "My Gabrielle, whom I believed as pure as the blessed angels up in heaven!"

"I am pure, Lionel!" she panted, her little hands clinging to his arm as she spoke. "And my only sin, dear, is that I loved too well! So well, in fact, that I condemned my own soul, but, Lionel, I am pure! No woman could be purer! and think of how I have loved you! Think of how I have lain in your arms, and you have kissed my eager lips! I might have denied this hateful marriage—I might have sworn that I was not this gypsy's wife and you would have believed me, Lionel, for you loved me so! But I love you too well to come to you with a lie upon my lips, and hear you call me by the sacred name of wife when I would have no right to that holy title. I thought I could utter a falsehood, but at the last moment I found I could not. Lionel, my love, my own dear love, say that you forgive me!"

A groan of despair was his only reply, and pressing her cheek against the hand she clasped so passionately, she whispered:

"Do not condemn me, Lionel, for love like mine only ends in death! From the very moment that I looked upon your dear face, my entire being has thrilled and throbbled in bliss both day and night! You have been unto me what the golden sunlight is to the flower—you have given me new life! And when I have been elated to your bosom, it has seemed to me, that it must be your precious blood that was rushing so madly through my veins! Ah, you are turning your head away from me, and my pleading is all in vain. Well, perhaps you are right. But I will go, and then you may cast a kindly thought upon me now and then because I loved you far better than my own life. Good-bye, dear, good-bye!"

She raised her pleading eyes to his face, but only stony despair was there written. He could not realize that she, his beautiful, bonny Gabrielle, was snatched away from his arms. Was it true that she belonged to another and that other a black-browed gypsy? Oh, God! it was awful! Casting one long, lingering look upon his beloved face, she suddenly bent her

head and kissed his hand, and then turned away, and holding out both hands to Lady Ethel, said softly:

"Ethel, dear friend, farewell. You have always been true and kind to me, and may God bless you and make you happy!"

"Gabrielle, you shall not go, you must not!" Lady Ethel cried, her lovely eyes drowned in tears. "Oh, Lord Thorndyke, surely you will not let her go away alone? Be kind and merciful to her, for she is so young and knows so little of the world! Have pity and forgive her!"

"Ethel, do not plead for me," Gabrielle answered very quietly. "I will look to my God for mercy, and also for my punishment," and with those words she left the room, her veil floating around her like a cloud of mist; and there was something in her voice that silenced her friends.

She reached her own room, and sinking upon her knees before the open window bowed her head and tried to think. There was nothing to do now but die. She could not live any longer, for her lover had passed from out her life. Alas! poor Gabrielle.

Outside in the garden she could hear the silver-throated nightingales, and they seemed to mock at her misery and despair. Last night she had listened to them, but, ah, how different then and now! It would never again be the same, never, never! The bright, beautiful dream was done, and nothing was left her save death.

"They are singing out there in the starshine, those nightingales, and they are singing—my death requiem!" she whispered, her heart dying within her white bosom.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"IF I MUST LOSE YOUR LOVE, LIONEL, THEN LET LIFE GO TOO!"

No sadder picture of sorrow and woe was ever witnessed this side of heaven than that of the beautiful young girl kneeling in her bridal robes, listening to the nightingale's song her hopeless eyes fixed upon the tiny, twinkling stars, as though asking those glittering orbs to guide her and show her the way through this awful vale of darkness that so suddenly enwrapped her life.

"I have nothing to live for now," she murmured in her slow, musical voice; "nothing at all! I shall never look upon his face again; never hear him speak; never feel his kisses upon my lips. Dear Heaven! what a life, what an existence, it would be away from him! I could never bear it—it would kill me!"

How calm and fair the night was! The golden stars and the smiling moon shed a soft, luminous light over all. The singing fount rose in rainbow-colored shafts, and then sought its own basin of crystal water again. And those nightingales! how they sung to each other, their bright eyes gleaming through the starlight that jeweled the land.

She had loved to listen to them once, thinking that nothing in this great, wide world was one half so sweet. But to-night every liquid note was torture, for it brought back days that were gone forever—days that could never come again—and unconsciously she murmured:

"Sing they so,  
And you be silent? Do I speak  
And you not hear? An arm you throw  
Round some one, and I feel so weak,  
Oh owl-like birds!—they sing for spite,  
They sing for hate, they sing for doom;  
They'll sing through death who sing  
through night,  
They'll sing and stun me to the tomb—  
The nightingales! the nightingales!"

"I loved to listen to them once, she whispered, her lips quivering, her eyes like live coals of fire, for she had not shed a tear as yet. But now, to-night, they seem to mock me. Their silvery voices sound harsh and unnatural to-night and even the fair, blue sky frowns upon me. Ah, well, I deserve it, perhaps—yes I know I do, but it is hard!"

The bronze head dropped forward and lay upon the window-sill like a fallen star. A dry, tearless sob left her lips and the slight form quivered from head to foot in agony and pain.

Suddenly a stifled cry burst from her, and stretching out both hands, she moaned:

"I must put an end to this anguish. If I must lose your love, Lionel, then let life go too."

She arose, and crossing the room, stood before the mirror and calmly surveyed herself. She did not falter, her hand did not even tremble. She had resolved what cause to pursue, and no power upon earth could change or alter her purpose now.

"I will write him a letter and try to tell him how dearly and truly I have loved him," she whispered, her hands clasped meekly together. "I cannot, if I were to live a thousand years, and spend each year in telling him of my love, begin to tell him what he has been to me, and what a heaven he made of my life for a few short weeks. I will try, but I shall not succeed."

She seated herself at a table and commenced to write, but tearing up sheet after sheet as soon as she had traced a few words upon the gleaming surface of the paper. Then she would sit resting upon one dimpled hand, lost in deep thought, forgetting all save the man she loved. Not a single thought did she bestow

upon the gypsy whose wife she was, for she whispered to herself that she would soon be beyond the reach of them all.

Let them curse her and scorn her as they liked, she would not hear it, for she would be lying cold and dead in the waters of the lake in whose silvery depths she had first beheld her lover's dear face.

"I said I would kill myself if I lost my lover, and I will keep my word," she said to herself, as she bowed her lovely face over the white paper, and began writing again. "But, oh, my love, my love, if I could only kiss your dear mouth just once before I die."

Once more the pen flowed smoothly over the paper, and left there the words that were read by Sir Lionel's eyes, and burned upon his brain forevermore. And oh, how many times did he raise his remorseful face up to heaven, and ask his God why his cross was so heavy.

"Lionel, my love," the letter, read, "I know that I shall never see your beloved face again, and I cannot go out of your life without writing you a few lines that will tell you my last thought was of you, dear, I know I have sinned and wronged you—you, the best and truest man that God's own glorious sunlight ever shone on—and yet it was all through love that I fell. It was my great and mighty love for you that caused me to be a living lie. But that is all past and gone, and you know, dear, that I loved you too well for my own good. But you will forgive me. Your heart is too brave and noble and true to cherish hatred and resentment against me. Some men would. But you are not like other men. I am going out of your life, dear—out of your heart too, if I have not already done so. But when I am dead, you may think kindly of me. I am going down to the lake, Lionel—the lake where I first saw your beloved face—and there I shall end all. I do not fear death—but I do fear and dread life out of your arms, away from your loving kisses, and I am not strong enough nor brave enough to fight the battle out alone, and even in the last moment I shall think of you. When the cold waves close over my head my last thoughts will be of you, and my love for you, and when I feel my eyes closing in death's calm sleep and the pitying water-lilies touch my dying face in sympathy, then will I long for you, and your love that has made life and living divine! Oh, Lionel! my love, my life, my all, farewell, and may a kind and merciful God make you happy as you deserve! I tried, dear, to make you happy, but I failed, and now I pay the penalty. Farewell, my own dear lover, and now and then cast one kind thought upon poor, sorrowful

"GABRIELLE"

The task was done. She arose to her feet and pressed her lips convulsively to the letter, and like a spirit glided from the room and down the long, winding stairway out into the silver moonlight. No one saw her, and she did not pause until she reached the edge of the lake. Motionless, she stood for a moment upon the bank of the lily-starred pool, her veil fluttering in the night-wind, her white satin dress no whiter than her face. She did not cry out. There was nothing to disturb the silence of the summer night only a sudden flash, a stir of the moonlit waters, then all was still.

Below in the flower-decked drawing room, where no marriage had taken place, Sir Lionel and Lady Ethel with Lord Thorndyke, were standing. The gypsy and his two veiled companions had mysteriously vanished, and when Lady Ethel turned to look for them, she saw with much surprise that they were gone. Somehow the revenge was not so sweet as the wicked gypsy had fancied it would be.

"He has gone," she said to Sir Lionel, "and I wanted to see him so much. There might have been a way out of this fearful affair. But now I fear it is hopeless."

Sir Lionel shook his head sadly, and answered: "No, Lady Ethel, there is no hope. Why, she did not even make an attempt to deny it! She acknowledged that all the gypsy said was true. Where then could there be a faint sign of hope?"

"But she will never go with him, that swarthy gypsy," Lady Ethel replied, with a shudder. "Oh, it is fearful—fearful. I cannot bear to think of it. She, Lady Gabrielle Thorndyke, the wife of a gypsy!"

"She is no longer Lady Gabrielle Thorndyke," the cold voice of Lord Thorndyke broke in. "She is the wife of that—that gypsy, and therefore no daughter of mine. I am childless. I have no child," and he made a ghastly attempt at a smile, and then added: "Unless you are willing to be my daughter, Ethel."

A sob burst from Lady Ethel's lips, and again she knelt at his feet and raised her blue eyes to his face while she pleaded: "Oh, will you not forgive her? Remember that she is so young, and she met that man when she was but a mere child. I do not say that she has done right in all things, for I know she has not. And yet I can forgive her and take her by the hand and still call her friend and sister, for I love her so! And there may come a day when I will need friends and sympathy! Oh, Lord Thorndyke, let me go to her and take her in my arms and tell her that she is forgiven! Let me whisper to her and say to her that her father, her lover and her friend, all forgive her, and that they all will shield her and guard her unto the end. Ah, do not turn away your head, my lord! Listen to me and heed my prayers!"

Not a single thought did she bestow

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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