

# LOVE.

—BY—

ABI. S. JACKMAN.

## CHAPTER XIII.—Continued.

As she was crossing the room, she caught a glimpse of herself in the long mirror, and she threw back her head with a scornful air. What, she, the Lady Gabrielle Thorndyke, fear a wandering magician? Never! she would face a thousand such ordeals and never flinch again.

"I am going to have my fortune told," she suddenly declared, with a gay reckless laugh, as they entered the drawing-room again, and all eyes were turned curiously upon her.

"Do not go near those creatures, dearest," Lady Ethel pleaded, her blue eyes resting appealingly upon Gabrielle's flushed face. "Please do not."

"But I shall," the wilful beauty insisted, and when Sir Lionel bent his handsome head and begged of her to give up the idea, she only shook her head and ran laughingly in the direction of the somber tent that towered up like an evil specter of darkness.

"Come back, Gabrielle darling," she heard her lover plead, but some unseen power seemed to force her along, and she could not resist it even if she would.

There was a smaller tent beside the magician's, and pushing aside the curtain that draped the narrow doorway, she entered, and found herself face to face with a veiled figure which was standing like a black statue, so motionless was she.

A shudder crept over the young girl's heart, but she bravely shook it off, and advancing to where the silent figure was standing, paused and held out one hand.

"Merciful Heaven! what was it that clutched her hand and held it in a clasp of iron? She could not move, she could not even cry out, for it seemed as if red-hot bands of molten lead were coiled around her fingers, and those burning eyes that peered at her from out the darkness, pierced her very soul through and through.

"So you want to learn what the future holds for you, fair lady?" the veiled woman asked, and as Gabrielle listened to that voice a chill like death crept over her. Oh, how much she would have given to break away, and never look upon this hateful creature again. But no, she was powerless, and she was forced to listen unto the end.

A silence crept over them, and then the strange voice broke the stillness once more:

"There is naught save pain and sorrow and despair before you, and your youth and beauty cannot keep it away. You love and are loved in return, but I see a day when your lover's eyes, that are blue as the summer sky, and in whose depths you have seen only love and tenderness, shall turn to bitter hate. The lips that have spoken only words of passionate love, and which you have kissed with your red mouth, shall curse you for your falsehood and deceit. And the arms whose warmth and strength you love to lie in, shall hurl you from them in scorn and loathing. Ah, you start, do you? But I can read the future, and here to-night I swear to you that you shall shed tears of blood redder by far than the roses that now lie dying upon your white breast. Bend your head while I whisper a few words in your pretty ear, intended for you, and you only—go back, fair one, to the gypsy husband that you believe dead, for he lives—yes, lives for sweet revenge."

The last words were fairly hissed in the horrified girl's ear, and she shrunk back with a cry of terror and fright. Oh, why had she ever entered this fearful place? Why had she not heeded her lover's warning and her friend's entreaties? she asked herself.

"Now go," the veiled woman said, suddenly flinging the dainty hand fiercely away from her. "Go, but remember what I say."

Half fainting, Gabrielle pushed aside the curtain, and was once more in the midst of the lights and flowers, her brain reeling, her heart throbbing madly.

"My darling, how pale you are," cried Sir Lionel, hastening to meet her, and drawing one little hand through his arm. "Why, your hands are like ice. What did she say to you to frighten you so?"

"Oh, she said I was not going to marry you, and that would make my heart turn cold," she answered, trying to laugh, and almost ending in a sob.

"Come out and get some air," her lover said, tenderly. "You will feel better then. Curse these fortune-tellers, anyway."

She did not answer as he led her out upon the rose-wreathed balcony, and placed her in a deep, soft easy chair, wrapping a fleecy shawl around her shoulders, and then kneeling before her, he whispered:

"Tell me all she said, darling. Your face is as white as the driven snow."

"She told me that I would never be your wife, Lionel," she said, with a sob, leaning her head against his breast.

"And, oh, my love, if I thought I would never be your wife, I would kill myself."

"But, my sweetheart, you will be my

wife, that you well know, and very soon, too. Surely you do not believe what a wandering fortune-teller says?" he said, lovingly, kissing the sweet lips again and again.

"No, I do not believe her," she half sobbed. "But, Lionel, I love you so dearly, that to even think of losing you, breaks my heart. You will never cease to love me, will you, dear?"

"My darling," he answered, solemnly, laying one hand tenderly upon her bowed head, "I shall love you forever. No matter what you might do, or how cruelly you might wound my heart, I should still love you. Of course, I know that you are incapable of doing wrong, but I love you so dearly, pet, that I could forgive almost anything."

Almost anything! He had said that he could forgive almost anything. He did not say he would forgive anything, and her heart grew sick within her, for if he knew all, oh, pitying Heaven, if he knew all! He would never forgive her that. He might overlook one act of folly, but he surely would not forgive her deceit and falsehood. And she loved him so. Surely no other woman had ever loved a man one-half so dearly as she loved her handsome young lover.

"I will test his love," she whispered feverishly to herself, "and God help me if he should condemn me through another."

"Lionel," she said, in a very low voice, that trembled piteously as she spoke, "if a woman deceived you once, could you ever feel that you could trust her again? Sometimes I have thought that I would be willing to have confidence in one who had sinned and repented. Would you trust such a one, dear?"

"No," he answered, thoughtfully, after a slight hesitation, and the single word struck a chill like death to her heart.

"No, I could never again trust one who had in any way deceived me or who had been untrue to me. It may seem harsh and cruel, but I should never look upon such a person's face again. But what put such strange notions into your pretty head, my darling? Deceit and falsehood are as far removed from your pure, young life, as the low, black pools of stagnant waters are below the glorious sunlight. Even the angels up in heaven are no purer, no fairer, than you are, my queen. I would as soon think one of the blessed saints from Paradise capable of sinning, as to dream that you could do wrong. I trust you in all things."

He kissed the little hands softly and she set her teeth tightly together to smother the cry that would come from her tortured heart. Oh, God, if he knew the cruel truth, he would hurl her from him, and then she would die. She clasped both arms about his neck in a passion of grief and pain, crying out:

"Lionel, if I should die suddenly some time, promise me that you will come to me, and just before the coffin-lid is shut down over my dead face for evermore, lay your lips on mine, so that I may carry the touch of your mouth with me even in the grave. For, oh, my darling, your kisses alone would make death sweet."

She was sobbing softly, and clinging to him, and he, thinking her nervous and hysterical, humored her fancies. Had he known what misery filled the tortured young heart, the distant, far away future might have been different.

"Let me get you a glass of wine, dearest," he said, tenderly. "I will be absent only a moment, and it will give you strength and quiet your nerves."

She watched the tall, handsome figure vanish in the midst of the lights and the flowers, and she leaned her tired head back against the soft cushions of the chair, and tried to think what it all meant.

Who was that fierce, dark creature who had whispered to her of the past? and who was the mysterious magician who seemed to know everything connected with that hateful, midnight marriage? It was her own face that she had seen, but in the excitement the others had not noticed it, and the other two faces were Leon Costello and the wicked princess, Lauretta. Was she slowly going mad, she asked herself, or was it a feverish dream from which she would soon awaken?

"Oh, if Lionel would only come back to me," she whispered in sudden terror, an icy hand seeming to clutch at her heart strings. "My God! is this fearful feeling madness?"

A light touch fell upon her shoulder, and she turned quickly, half expecting to see her lover's smiling face, but instead, her eyes rested upon an object that caused her to fall back with staring, horrified eyes, and ashen lips, from which no sound was heard. The blood seemed to settle in frozen waves around her heart as she sat there, unable to utter a sound, but slowly going mad.

## CHAPTER XIV.

"YOUR CRUEL FACE IS EVER BEFORE MY EYES TO REMIND ME OF THAT ONE MAD ACT WHICH WRECKED MY PEACE OF MIND FOR EVERMORE!"

Inside the music throbbed softly on, the lights glowed in the midst of bud and blossom, and the fragrant fountain rose and fell in jewelled shafts of beauty and crystal brightness, while the fair mistress of all this grandeur and magnificence sat outside with blanched face and staring eyes, looking straight ahead of her, unable to utter a single word. All she could

do was to stare at the horrible vision that had haunted her for many long days and nights.

She could not move, she could not speak, for her tongue seemed glued to the roof of her mouth, a dry and worthless thing. Her hands were icy cold, and she could feel the blood freezing all life and happiness out of her heart as it settled in cold waves of horror in every vein. And those beyond the dark shadows in the midst of light and music envied her! Oh, God! for what? For her haunted heart, her days of fear and agony, her nights of feverish nightmare? They envied her, thinking she was blessed with all a young girl's heart could desire—youth, beauty, wealth and a brave and handsome lover, who adored her.

But they did not dream of the shadow, that awful dark cloud, that darkened and spoiled her life and made her wish that a merciful God would end it all as she sat there in despair and terror, the moonlight flooding her agonized face with its silver rays. Would they pity her if they knew all? she asked herself, or would they condemn her and turn coldly away, saying her sin was unpardonable? All of these thoughts darted through her agonized brain, and still she could not speak. And that hateful face, with its mocking smile and bleeding wound in its low, dark brow, was there before her, seeming to warn her that the fatal blow would soon fall now.

She clutched her hands tightly together upon the padded arms of the chair, and a feeling of bitter anger swelled within her breast. What right had the spirit of that gypsy with his bleeding brow to come and haunt her! He was dead. She had seen her father's hand fire the shot that killed him, and yet must he haunt her forever?

Then a terrible fear crept into her throbbing brain. It was a hundred times worse than the idea that his restless spirit was allowed to return to earth and haunt her. For if it was true, then there would be no escape for her, and her doom would be sealed.

What if her father's shot had not proved fatal? she asked herself in a sort of a deadly terror. What if it was only a wound, from which Leon Costello had quickly recovered and, thirsting for revenge, had followed her from the rugged mountains of Colorado to England, and when life bloomed to its brightest and best for her, he would strike the last fatal blow that would rob her of her lover, home and father, and disgrace her before the whole world, for she knew that her father would never look upon her face again when he learned her secret, and she, the beautiful Lady Gabrielle Thorndyke, in honor of whose birthday the grand old mansion was alight with music and flowers and jewels—she would be an outcast, a gypsy's bride.

It was too much for the proud, tortured soul to bear, and breaking the spell which enwrapped her senses with a mighty effort, she started up, crying out in a strangled voice:

"Are you flesh and blood, demon, or is it your wicked, restless soul that comes back from the other world to haunt me? Speak, and end this fearful suspense!"

A hollow, unearthly burst of laughter was her answer, and she shuddered as she listened, for it was Leon Costello's voice that she heard.

Oh, how she would have liked to seize a dagger and hurl it at that mocking, blood-stained face that was peering at her through the sweet, climbing roses. She would soon know whether it was flesh and blood, or a spirit freed from all earthly guise.

She leaned forward, and looking into those blazing eyes that were half hidden by the blossoms, said in low, intense tones:

"Your cruel face is ever before my eyes, to remind me of that one mad act, which has wrecked my peace of mind for evermore! Why do you follow me and torture me, Leon Costello? for be you spirit, or be you flesh and blood, I hate you, I hate you!"

Again that taunting laugh rang out upon the mild night air, and then she heard a voice repeat the verse that had been a source of terror to her ever since the night when she lay and watched her lover's face while he read aloud to her, from her pet poet, "Swinburne."

It was the same ugly voice that had echoed the words intended for her ear only, and unheard by her lover:

"I wish you were dead, my dear; I would give you, had I to give, Some death too bitter to fear; It is better to die than live."

There was a devilish meaning in the words that made the girl shudder. It was no spirit repeating those lines, for they surely came from the lips of a living man, and one whose sole thought was revenge!

She covered her face with her hands, her soul growing sick within her, and again she heard the voice:

"I wish you were stricken by thunder And burnt with a bright flame through, Consumed and cloven asunder, I coud at your feet like you."

"God in heaven pity and help me, for it is Leon Costello some back from death to torture me!" she moaned, and when she uncovered her eyes the hateful face had vanished, and only the last lingering echo of his voice remained.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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