

THE GYPSY QUEEN'S VOW.

By JANIE O'BRIEN.

(Continued.)

"You can—you can! It is in your power! You are great and rich and powerful, and can have his sentence annulled. By your soul's salvation, by your hopes of heaven, by your mother's grave, by Him whom you worship, I conjure you to save my son!"

A fearful sight was that despair-maddened woman, as she knelt at the stern earl's feet, her very voice sharp with inward agony.

He shaded his eyes with his hands to keep out the pitiful sight; but his stern, determined look passed not away. His face seemed hardened with iron, despite the deep pity in his heart.

"You are yielding! He will yet be saved! Oh, I knew that iron-heart would soften!" she cried out, taking hope from his silence.

"My poor woman, you deceive yourself. I can do nothing for your son, said the earl.

"What? Do you still refuse? Oh, it cannot be! I am going mad, I think! Tell me—tell me that my son will live!"

"Woman, I have no power over your son's life."

"Oh, you have—you have! Do you think he could live one single day among those with whom you would send him? As you hope for pardon, pardon my son!"

"It is all in vain. Rise, madam."

"You refuse?"

"I do. Rise."

With the bound of a wild beast, she sprang to her feet, and like a tigress robbed of her young, she stood before him. Even the stern earl drew back in dismay.

"Then, heart of steel, hear me!" she cried, in a voice terrific in its very depth of despair. "From this moment I vow, before God, to devote my whole life to revenge on you! Living, may ruin, misery, and despair, equal to mine, be your portion; dead, may you never rest in the earth you sprung from! And when, standing before the judgment seat of God, you see for pardon, may be hurl your miserable soul back to perdition for an answer! May my curse descend to your children and children's children for ever! May every earthly and eternal evil follow a wronged mother's curse!"

Appalled, horrified, the iron earl shrank back from that convulsed, terrific face—that face of a fiend, and not of mortal woman. A moment after, when he raised his head, he was alone, and the gypsy, Keturah, was gone. Whither?

CHAPTER V.

MOTHER AND SON.

"O my son Abasalom! my son Abasalom! Would to God, I might die for thee! O Abasalom! my son, my son!"

That same night—three hours later, in a narrow, dark, noisome cell, with grated window and iron-barred door, with one flickering, uncertain lamp lighting its tomb-like darkness, sat two young men. One of these was a youth of three-and-twenty; tall and slender, with a dark complexion; a strikingly handsome face; a daring, reckless air, and an expression of mingled scorn, hatred, defiance, and fierceness in his face. There were fetters on his wrists and ankles, and he wore the dress of a condemned felon.

By his side sat Lord Ernest Villiers—his handsome face looking deeply sad and grave.

"And this is all, Germaine?" he said, sorrowfully. "Can I do nothing at all for you?"

"Nothing. What do you think I want? Is not the Government going to clothe, feed and provide for me during the remainder of my life? Why man do you think me unreasonable?" He laughed a bitter, mocking laugh, terrible to hear.

"Germaine, Heaven knows, if I could do anything for you I would!" said Lord Villiers, excitedly. "My father believes you guilty, and I can do nothing. But remember that you leave one in England who still believes you innocent!"

"Thank you, Villiers. There is another too, who, I think, will hardly believe I have taken to petty pilfering, your father and the rest of the magnates of the land to the contrary, notwithstanding."

"Who is that, Germaine?"

"My mother."

"Where is she? Can I bring her to you?" said Lord Villiers, starting up.

"You are very kind; but it is not in your power to do so," said the prisoner, quietly. "My mother is probably in Yetholm with her tribe. You don't need to be told, now, I am a gypsy: my interesting family history was pretty generally made known at my trial." Again he laughed that short, sarcastic laugh so sad to hear.

"My dear fellow, I think none the worse of you for that. Gipsy, or Saxon, I cannot forget you once saved my life, and that you have been for years my best friend."

"Well, it is pleasant to know that there is one in the world that cares for me; and if I do die like a dog among my fellow-convicts, my last hour will be cheered by the thought," said the young man. "If ever you see my mother tell her I was grateful for all she did for me; you need not tell her I was innocent, for she will know that. There is another, too—" He paused, and his dark face flushed, and then grew paler than before.

"Germaine, if there is any message I can carry for you, you have only to command me," said the young lord.

"No. It is as well she should not know it—better, perhaps," muttered the prisoner. "I thank you for your kindness, Villiers; but it will not be necessary."

"And your mother, how am I to know her?"

"Oh, I forgot! Well, she's called the gipsy Keturah, and is queen of her tribe. It is something to be a queen's son—is it not?" he said.

"Keturah, did you say?" repeated Lord Villiers.

"Yes. What has surprised you now?"

"Why, the simple fact that I saw her three hours ago."

"Saw her! Where?"

"At my father's house. She came to see him."

Germaine sprang up, and while his eyes fiercely flashed, he exclaimed: "Come to see Lord De Courcy? Villiers, you do not mean to say that my mother came to beg for my life?"

"My dear fellow, I really do not know. All I do know is, that half an hour after my father returned among the guests, I never saw him with so startled a look before. Whether your mother had any thing to do with it or not, I really cannot say."

"If I thought she could stoop to sue for me," exclaimed the youth, "but no, my mother was too proud to do it. My poor poor mother! How was she looking, Villiers?"

"Very haggard, very thin, very wretched, in a word—though that was to be expected."

"Poor mother!" murmured the youth, with quivering lips.

"My dear fellow," said Lord Villiers, "your mother shall never want while I live."

The prisoner wrung his hand in silence. "If you like, I will try to discover her, and send her to you before you—"

His voice choked, and he stopped.

"My dear Villiers, you have indeed proven yourself my friend," said the convict; "if you could see her and send her to me before I leave England, you would be conferring the greatest favor on me. There are things of which I wish to speak to her, which I cannot reveal to any one else—not even to you."

"Then I will instantly go in search of her," said Lord Villiers, rising. "My dear Germaine, good-bye."

"Farewell, Ernest. God bless you!" And so they parted. Did either dream how strangely they were destined to meet again? With his face shaded by his hands the prisoner sat; when a noise as of persons in altercation met his ears. He raised his head to listen, and recognized the gruff voice of his jailer; then the sharp voice of a woman; and lastly the calm, clear tones of Lord Ernest Villiers. His words seemed to decide the matter; for the heavy door swung back, and the tall form of the gipsy Keturah passed into the cell.

"Mother!" The prisoner started to his feet, and with a passionate cry: "O my son! my son!" he was clasped in the arms of his mother.

"Thank Heaven, mother! that I see you again!"

"Heaven! she broke out with passionate fierceness, "never mention it again! What is Heaven, and mercy, and happiness? All a mockery, and worse than a mockery!"

"My poor mother!"

"What have I done that I should lose you?" she cried. What crime have I committed, that I should be doomed to a hell upon earth? "But I will have revenge!" she added, while her fierce eyes blazed, and her long, bony hand clenched—"yes, fearful revenge!"

"Mother! mother! Do not talk so! Be calm!"

"Calm! With these flames, like eternal fires, raging in my heart and brain!"

"Mother, are you going mad? Unless you are calm we must part."

"Oh yes! We must part to-morrow. You will go over the boundless sea with all the thieves and murderers and scum of London, and I—I will live for revenge. By-and-by you will kill yourself, and I will be hung for his murder."

"Poor mother!" said the youth sadly. "Try and bear up for my sake. Did you see Lord De Courcy to-night?"

"I did. May Heaven's heaviest curses light on him!" exclaimed the woman passionately. "Oh! to think that he should hold my son's life in his hand, while I am here powerless to avert the blow! May God's vengeance light on him here and hereafter."

"Mother, did you stoop to sue for pardon for me to-night?" said the young man, while his brow contracted with a dark frown.

"Oh, I did! I did! I groveled at his feet. I cried, I shrieked, I adjured him to pardon you—and he refused! I kissed the dust at his feet, and he replied by cold refusal. But woe to thee, Earl De Courcy!" she cried, bounding to her feet. "Woe to thee, and all thy house! for it were safer to tamper with the lightning chain than with the aroused Keturah."

"Mother, nothing is gained by working yourself up to such a pitch of passion; you only beat the air with your breath. I am calm."

"Yes, calm as a volcano on the verge of eruption," she said, looking in his gleaming eyes and icy smile.

"And I am submissive, forbearing, and forgiving."

"Yes, submissive as a crouching lion—forgiving as a tiger robbed of its young—fearing as a serpent preparing to spring."

He had awed her—even her, that raving maniac—into calm, by the cold, steady glitter of his dark eyes; by the quiet, chilling smile on his lip.

"We understand each other, I think," said the gipsy queen, "how utterly idle these mad threats and curses of yours are. They will effect nothing, but to have you imprisoned as a dangerous lunatic; and it is necessary you should be free to fulfil my last request."

(To be Continued.)

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