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IONE: A BROKEN LOVE DREAM

BY LAURA JEAN LIBBEY

Author of "A Broken Betrothal," "Parted by Fate," "Parted at the Altar," "Heiress of Cameron Hall," "Miss Middleton's Lover," Etc., Etc.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Someday I cannot think she is marrying the gentleman for love, for there were tears in her eyes as she turned away.

If you arrive after we have left you might come on to the church; if you like, seeing that you are invited by the young lady; but mind, William, if you do come, you are to wear your Sunday best. You will find your clothes all laid out in your room.

William Malcolm never finished that letter. With a mighty cry he sprang to his feet. Glancing up at the clock ticking merrily on the wall, he saw that it wanted twenty minutes to four.

"My God!" he cried. "I would not be in time to save her! But I can try—yes, with Heaven's help I can try!"

Hurrying out to the stable, he led out Akbar with an alacrity that fairly astounded that easy-going old animal, and harnessed him, springing quickly into the saddle.

One cut with his whip sent him fairly flying down the road. It was ten good miles to the church indicated in his mother's letter. He knew of a route he could take across lots, which would save him at least half the distance, he therefore turned his horse's head in that direction, riding at a breakneck speed, as though a human life depended on it.

One or two farmers, jogging along at an easy rate in their wagons, looked after the flying horseman in amazement. One called back to him: "Look alive there, stranger, there's danger ahead, they are repairing the road just beyond the curve."

But William Malcolm never heard—never heeded them. At last through the trees, afar off yet, he beheld the steep side of a cold church.

"Heaven grant that I may be in time," he cried, hoarsely, urging his horse to greater speed; but the animal was already exhausted far beyond his endurance.

It was never known just how it happened—whether old Akbar grew frightened at the shower of apple blossoms the wind blew over the road, or whether he stumbled on the rocky road—suddenly he shied and reared, and the next moment was galloping riderless down the road.

For long hours William Malcolm lay white, rigid, unconscious, in the long grass by the roadside. Slowly the hands of time moved; the sun sank in the west, the dusk of night crept on and settled into darkness; slowly one by one, the golden-hearted stars came out and fixed themselves in the blue heavens—still the rigid figure lay motionless under the waving trees. Was he dead, or dying? Only the night wind sobbing a requiem over him could have answered.

It so happened that this was the particular night on which Arthur Rochester had bidden farewell to his home forever. I was his intention to take the outgoing steamer for Europe, but interests which he had at Cornwall requiring his attention, he was obliged to go on there.

At the depot he had taken a carriage, and was driving along the lonely country road, when a low moon, seemingly coming from a clump of adjacent bushes to the right, fell distinctly upon his ear.

Mr. Rochester drew rein and listened. Again the sound was repeated. Hastily springing from his buggy, he secured his horse, and searched carefully in the vicinity from whence the sound proceeded.

He was soon rewarded by finding the body of a man lying under the trees. By the faint gleam of the stars he could see that the man's face was covered with blood, which flowed through a small wound on his temple.

It was but the work of a moment to lift him into the buggy, and catching up the reins, Arthur drove in headlong haste to the village, that he might have medical attention as soon as possible.

He found Dr. Willard at home, and the young man was conveyed quickly into his office.

"Ah! I understand how it came about," said the doctor. "This counts for the horse that came galloping riderless into the village this afternoon. The animal threw him, no doubt. Parties are out now in search of the man who rode him."

"Dr. Willard looked grave when he examined the wound.

"Directly on the temple," he said. "That's very bad. If he lives, then to one it will leave him a lunatic—a case for some asylum, poor fellow!"

The wound was soon dressed. Then the effects of the opiate which had been administered began to wear away.

"Where am I?" asked William Malcolm at length, struggling up to a sitting posture. Looking in bewilderment around him. "How came I here? Oh, I remember!" he cried out in horror. "I was going to stop the marriage. My horse stumbled and threw me. Great God! I must be too late! Do not attempt to detain me!" he cried, as the doctor held him back. "I must go!"

"As I feared," said the doctor. "The man is raving crazy. Their hallucinations always take some strange form."

"He seems particularly sane," replied Arthur Rochester.

"They all seem so," replied the doctor, dryly. "You will see for yourself presently that he will have a perfect mania on the subject of stopping marriages. I should not wonder a bit if his sweetheart had jilted him, poor fellow!"

Arthur Rochester soon took his leave.

In vain William Malcolm protested that he was perfectly able to resume his journey when he found himself alone with this doctor.

"Certainly, you shall go very soon," replied Dr. Willard; but to Malcolm's intense surprise, he saw him quietly turn the key in the lock.

"May I inquire what that action was for?" asked Malcolm.

"You may inquire, certainly, my good fellow," replied the doctor, with a good-humored laugh.

"Will you answer me?" demanded Malcolm.

"That is quite another matter," laughed the doctor.

Young Malcolm, when he was aroused to intense anger, was a man to be dreaded. Even the doctor was amazed at the tempestuous rage into which he flew at this answer. "Quite as mad as a March hare," he concluded.

"Open that door!" cried Malcolm, springing forward, and attempting to take the key from him by main force. "Every moment you are keeping me here is precious."

"Exactly," replied the doctor; "but really, I see no help for it. Stay here you must for the present."

"I will not!" cried Malcolm, grasping a chair, and in the intense excitement of the moment, fired to the very brink of madness at being thus confined. He brought it down with full force upon the doctor's head, crying, hoarsely: "Now will you open that door?"

Stung to fierce rage, the doctor turned and grappled with him, and in his weak state, Malcolm was soon overcome.

"I shall pay you well for that blow, my fine fellow!" cried the doctor, furiously. "I was intending to send you to the hospital, but now I shall send you where you belong—to the asylum. I fancy you will become the straight-jacket into which you will be placed."

Smarting under the severe pain of the blow, Dr. Willard made out, in the darkness, the figure of Malcolm to the asylum at once, and hastily summoned his assistants to execute the order.

The truth must be stated here and now. Although Dr. Willard was an impulsive man, he was nevertheless an honest one. He was firmly imbued with the belief that the man before him was insane, and a danger to the community at large, and that it was an imperative duty to see him put in confinement at the earliest possible moment.

The attendants soon appeared, and raving and cursing in one breath, and pleading the most, poor Malcolm was hurried away from the office, and into a coach standing before the door.

more the door, and ere the day broke he found himself an inmate of the asylum on Blackwell's Island.

All in vain he told his story, pleading with those about him to find out for themselves whether he spoke truthfully or falsely. No one replied. Who would take the trouble to investigate the story that fell from a supposed maniac's lips? All night long Malcolm paced his narrow room despite the pain in his head, crying aloud to Heaven that his hands were tied. He could have saved poor Ione Lawrence from a marriage that would prove the bitterest curse, but now it was beyond his power.

All night long he listened to the frightful sounds about him, murmuring in a horrible whisper, that he should be amid these surroundings.

The next morning Arthur Rochester, chancing to pass the doctor's office, stopped for a moment to learn how his patient of the night before progressed, and was amazed to learn that he had been summarily disposed of.

"I cannot believe that the poor fellow is insane, doctor," he said, thoughtfully. "It seems quite incredible."

"You would have believed it had you been here when he attempted to murder me with that chair," he responded, dryly. "I have never seen a more desperate lunatic at large."

All that day the conviction haunted Arthur Rochester that, for once in his life, the shrewd doctor was in error. The subject so weighed upon Arthur's heart—he could not tell why—that he found himself wondering if he ought not to take a trip over to the asylum and satisfy himself. At last he went.

To his surprise Malcolm knew him at once; still, he must not make that the test of the young man's sanity.

"You are the gentleman who found me lying by the roadside yesterday," he said, with deep emotion.

"Yes," replied Arthur Rochester, kindly.

"Would to Heaven you had left me there to die rather than have saved me for such a fate as this! I beg you, in all calmness, to listen to me, sir. I am not a madman, as you think me; I am as sane as your self."

As he listened, somehow the young man's words carried conviction with them to Arthur Rochester's heart that he was speaking the solemn truth.

Many a man had been wrongfully thrust into a felon's cell when he was innocent, by force of circumstances; many a man had been confined in a madhouse by injustice and foul wrong, who was perfectly sane, dragged out a miserable life, and had died there, leaving vengeance to Heaven.

Arthur thought of this as he gazed into the clear, earnest eyes of the young man standing there before him.

"I admit I was under great mental excitement when the doctor sought to restrain me," he said, sadly, "and no man ever had more cause to be so, could have saved a woman from the cruellest of fates. It is too late now. Her doom has been sealed ere this."

"In what way?" asked Arthur, curiously.

"To begin with," replied Malcolm, "I am the son of Peter Malcolm, the boat-maker, and live in the little village of K—, up the Harlem River."

"One night, some six weeks since, father and I were out with one of the new boats, when, looking on scarcely three feet in front of us, I beheld something dark in the water, and as I looked it instantly disappeared, only to reappear a moment later a little further on. Then, to my amazement, I saw a woman's face."

"An instant I had flung off my coat and spring to the rescue.

"We took her home—father and I—and there she lay for long weeks, shivering between life and death. Her mother's constant watchful care saved her, I often think."

"She was young and lovely, sir. I am but a rough fellow, sir, and I cannot find words to tell you what she was like. Her face was as pretty as a white rose, and her lips and delicately rounded cheeks like scarlet blossoms. And those eyes! Ah, they were like soft, bright stars."

"Do you wonder that I learned to love her, sir, when the passionate depths of my heart—that the whole world seemed centred in her smile, and the world's frown in her sadness?"

"I had never thought much about love. I never knew it could change a man so completely that even to himself he seemed a different being."

"I worshipped her from afar, sir, content to stare and gaze at her as if she were some divine being. I—I would have given my life for her!"

"I began to dread the day when she should recover sufficiently to—to leave us. I would not think of that dark hour."

"But I should not tell you my story, sir," he said, sadly. "How could it interest you?"

"It does interest me," responded Arthur, earnestly. "Pray go on."

"When consciousness came to her, and my mother told her how I had rescued her, she sent for me."

"You have saved my life," she said, looking out her little white hand to me. "Oh, pray forgive me for saying it was a cruel kindness. I wish I had died in the cold, dark water's."

To be Continued.

It's possible to give a man a silver dollar and have him call it square.

We may understand the photographer, although he is a poser.

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