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ELAINE: 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.

"Love like mine knows no reason," she answered, bitterly. "I ask you once more: Will you give her up?" "I can never love another," he answered, sadly. "I would care for you if I could, Elaine, but, alas! I cannot."

"Will you never love me?" she asked, in a low, breathless, intense tone that might have warned him of his coming danger.

"I will not deceive you, Elaine, or build your poor heart up on false hopes. I can never love you as I should the woman whom I would call my wife."

"You have changed my whole life, Arthur, she cried, shrilly, "and there is such a thing as love turning to the bitterest hate in a single instant; and I hate you now even as passionately as I have ever loved you. I will torture your heart, pain for pain, as you have tortured mine."

"Elaine! Elaine!" cried Arthur. "In Heaven's name, calm yourself! You distress me greatly!"

He never forgot the look she turned upon him while his life lasted. Here was a side of the girl's nature he had never dreamed of, and he thought of the line—

"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned."

"I will have a glorious revenge upon you!" she cried. "It is sweet to me to know that I have parted you from the one you love forever. I could have saved her for you, but no, I would not."

Arthur looked at her in astonishment. He quite thought the sorrow which she had taken so deeply to heart had turned her brain. A terrible laugh fell from her lips that sent the blood through her veins in a cold chill.

"Yes, I could have saved her," she muttered, "but I found out it was she whom you loved."

He was convinced more than ever, by these incoherent words, that Elaine was losing her reason.

"You think I am going mad, but you will shortly see a method in my madness that will shock you, I fancy."

"Elaine," he said, "pray so no more."

His soothing tone exasperated her. "Have you ever settled in your mind what became of your love on the night of that yachting party?" she asked, shrilly. "You see, I am not so much of a dupe as you have imagined me to be. Hark—hear me through; do not interrupt me; and I will tell you and the world where to find your love."

"Elaine, you must be mad—quite mad!" he answered, sadly. "You have strange hallucinations."

"You will not persist in saying that much longer," she cried. "And there was such profound emotion, such a look on her face, that, even against his own will, her words were carrying a strange thought to his shocked heart. There was such an irresistible ring of truth in her voice that no one could doubt that she knew what she was saying. He felt compelled to listen. "You remember that night of the yachting party?" she continued, "while I shall never forget it. It was in the grounds of the villa where we stopped for luncheon that I first found out my lover's perfidy."

"Hush!" she cried again, as he was about to speak. "Hear me through."

"From the hour in which you told me you had loved before—but refused to mention whom—I set my woman's wits together to discover who my rival was—for I felt still that she was my rival. It matters not how I discovered her to be Ione Lawrence. We will pass over that."

"I was an eye witness to your interview with her by the fountain. I admit frankly that I did such an unpardonable act of folly as to listen—myself unseen. When the happiness of a life is at stake one does not stand upon ceremony. When I heard you cry out to her: 'In Heaven's name, tell me if you love me still, Ione!' I thought I should go mad. Do you know what the pangs of jealousy are like—how it tears the heart in twain with a pain more cruel than death? Well, that is what I suffered as I stood there, listening to you, who were my betrothed lover, pleading for another's love."

Again she held up her white jeweled hand, and again that terrible laugh fell from her white lips, which was more horrible to hear than the bitterest cry could have been.

"You must not interrupt me if you would learn Ione Lawrence's fate," she cried. "Let me try to tell you how desperately I hated the girl whom you loved as I turned away; but, ah, words fail me. I brooded over what I had seen and heard long after we had all returned to my yacht. She passed me by when I stood quite alone, and I called her. She came up to where I stood, and her eyes seemed to fairly gleam with triumph as they met mine. How I hated the girl's fair beauty."

"But for you," I cried in my heart, "his love would be mine. Though he were my wedded husband a thousand times over, his heart would still be yours. I thought, bitterly."

"The drifting moonlight fell upon her proud face—the white dress and the snowy wrap she wore; and as I watched her, I could understand the fascination she possessed. Yes, she was fatally fair."

"You wished to speak with me, Miss Granger," she said, coldly. "May I ask that you will be as brief as possible."

"I clutched her white arm with my hands, fairly beside myself with rage."

"You shall stay here until you have heard all that I have to say to you," I cried; and I threatened her with my vengeance if she attempted to take you from me."

"I will listen to no more," she cried, struggling to free herself. "I cannot tell you how it happened. She lost her balance, and fell backward, down—down into the seething waves."

"Awful terror seized me. I was alone, strong as my very life, came upon you? I stood quite still, gazing down into the dark waters. I did not see her rise again, and the yacht sailed on. Now my story is told. You know now what my love for you has done. Take what revenge you will—it will not lessen what I have done—it will not restore your love to you. If I cannot have your love, I know this—that Ione Lawrence, my rival, never can."

Arthur Rochester stretched out his hands with a terrible cry.

"My God! My God, Elaine! I cannot believe this! You could not be so inhuman as to see that poor girl drown before your eyes and not call for help," he groaned in his anguish.

"I would do the same thing over again," cried Elaine. "I glory in the thought, that if your love is not for me, my rival is beyond the reach of it. Always remember that, Arthur Rochester!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

It was the most intensely thrilling moment of Arthur Rochester's life. He stood like a man turned to stone as he listened to the fatal truth as to Ione's fate, as it fell from her rival's lips.

"Elaine," he cried hoarsely, "if I were to believe you for one moment, I should go mad."

"All I have told you is quite true," she replied. "The girl is dead. She will never come between your love and mine again."

With a bitter groan, wrung from the very depths of his tortured heart, Arthur turned and strode away. No mortal man was ever in a more cruel situation.

Should he give to the world Elaine's confession, thus unraveling the terrible mystery surrounding Ione's disappearance? Or, seeing it could not bring life back to his dead love, let matters rest where they were. The long interval that had intervened would preclude all possibility of finding the body.

Only Heaven knew the pangs it cost him to decide so hard a question. How he cried out to the listening angels to forgive Elaine if they could, for he never should.

She had not plunged a dagger into the girl's white breast. She had not held a draught of poison to her lips. Still it was murder, to stand there and see her rival perish before her eyes, and not cry out for help when it was so near at hand, to save her.

That evening he wrote a short note to Elaine, which ran as follows:

"Miss Granger—Madam—I leave my father's house to-night—care, within this hour. The roof which shelters you can never shelter me. Meeting you would be simply torture for me. I could not look upon your hands without feeling that there were crimson stains upon them which nothing could wash away. May Heaven pardon you for what you have done, for I never shall."

"Arthur."

Mr. Rochester heard of his son's intended departure with the greatest consternation, as did his sister.

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he was quarreled with Elaine," he said, helplessly. "She will give me no satisfaction about the matter, but goes about pale and deathly. He refuses to speak on the subject. There never was a young man who has so much trouble with his love affairs, it appears to me."

"It has all come about by your interfering in these love affairs, in the first place, John," returned Hilda Rochester, quietly. "Everything has gone all wrong with Arthur ever since."

"It was the one wish of my life to see him married to Elaine. I hope that will not fall through," retorted the old millionaire, grimly. "Every effort must be made to reconcile the lovers."

When Arthur was broached upon the subject a little later, he grew white as death.

"For Heaven's sake! never refer to this again, father," he cried, "or you will drive me mad! Try to believe that all is over between Elaine and myself. She shall never be wife of mine. Never!"

"It can only be some foolish lovers' quarrel," declared Mr. Rochester. "You must not let that wreck the happiness of a lifetime."

"I know, father," returned Arthur. "The very sound of her name is most distasteful to me. I am going where I shall never see her face again—never while I live."

"I should never have told him his father's doubts might have been before, they settled down into a positive conviction now; that all was indeed over between his son and his beautiful wife."

When Arthur took his departure, a face, white as marble, watched him from the lace-draped windows of an upper room.

"He has gone out of my life forever," muttered Elaine. "I have lost him; but even in this hour of torture I am exultant at the thought that my rival cannot win him. He has kept my secret—not out of respect for me—but to spare her memory. I should never have told him the fatal truth, but that he goaded me to frenzy, and in an unguarded moment it fell from my lips. Ah me—ah me! why should love be called the world's blessing, I wonder, while so many women it proves so bitter a curse. I, too, shall leave this place. I cannot stay where every room is haunted by his face," she muttered.

All in vain Mr. Rochester tried to persuade her to remain, when Elaine made known to him her decision the next day.

"But, my dear, where would you go?" he exclaimed in bewilderment. "This has been your home since you were a little child. A young girl cannot go out into the world alone. Besides, I imagine that when Arthur's anger has had time to cool, he will return to you. The course of true love never did run smooth, you know."

"He never will be any more to me than he is now," she answered, slowly, as she turned abruptly away.

The next afternoon Elaine left her guardian's house, taking Patricia, her maid, with her. No one felt regret, save old Mr. Rochester, for the wilful, petted heiress had not been much of a favorite among the servants of the household. Their destination was a small village in the interior of the State.

"I want to get away from the sight and sound of the water, Patricia," she said, as the train steamed out of the depot. "I can always against the side of the boat; and the sound fills me with terror."

Leaving them for the present, we will turn to that fatal night on which Ione Lawrence was left alone to the mercy of the white-capped waves, to live or die, as Heaven saw fit.

A wild cry fell from Ione's lips as she discovered herself falling, but the shrill whistle of the yacht, as she skimmed over the waters, drowned it.

From the time she struck the water, Heaven was kind to her. Unconsciousness claimed her, and the awful horror of the situation was robbed of its mighty terror. She sank, pale, and as her white face cleared the dark waters, two men, who were in a boat, pulling hard for the opposite shore, gave a simultaneous cry.

In an instant the little boat was headed about, and the younger man had torn off his coat and sprang to the rescue, and a moment later, panting with exhaustion, he had handed Ione to his companion in the boat, and had clambered in himself. "It looks like there had been foul play, father," he said. "We had better make straight for home with the girl, and see if anything can be done for her; she does not even breathe."

"Attend to the oars, Billy," returned his companion, "and I'll see what virtue there is in this." And as he spoke he produced a small flask from his pocket and held it to Ione's lips. A faint moan soon rewarded his efforts.

The men were Peter Malcolm, the skiff-builder, and William, his son. Rapidly plying the oars for some twenty minutes or more brought them to the shore, and lifting the slight figure in his stalwart arms, the father hurried rapidly on to his home, which adjoined the boat-house but a few yards distant.

William, who was just preparing tea for his husband and son, cried out in amazement as the door was pushed hurriedly open, and her husband strode into the room with his dripping head, and held it to Ione's lips. A faint moan soon rewarded his efforts.

The good woman's sympathies were enlisted straightway.

"I will do everything possible for the bonny lass, Peter," she said. "Poor, pretty, young thing! she has the face of an angel," she murmured, as she wrung out the dripping river water from the soft brown curls.

To be continued.

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