

FETTERED BY FATE

BY ALEXANDER ROBERTSON

"Jollette's Fate," "Little Sweetheart," "Lottie, the Sewing Girl," "Goldmaker of Lisbon," "Wedded to Win," "Diana Thorne," "Nora's Legacy," Etc., Etc.

CHAPTER V.

Captain Grant had passed sharply in a desultory ramble. There stood before him one upon whom his eyes became glued, and as he looked upon her features it could be plainly seen that he gave quite a start, though immediately after he was himself again, cool and collected.

"Who are you, girl, and what do you seek here?" he asked, somewhat haughtily.

"I am Barbara Merriles, the gypsy," replied the girl, her eager eyes first fastened upon his face wonderingly, expectantly, and then, with a disappointed expression, turning upon his hand.

Captain Grant held his left hand behind him, seemingly in a careless manner. As yet she had not been able to catch even a glimpse of it.

"I am searching for a man," she continued.

"Ah, indeed. And may I inquire what success has attended your search thus far?" asked the Captain, into whose eyes came a most peculiar gleam.

That look betrayed him. He might disguise his features, alter his voice beyond recognition, but the eyes of hate are keener than those of love, and Barbara Merriles had seen that expression in his eyes too often to forget it. She knew him now.

"I have searched far and wide for him," she said—"the man who ruined my life, and killed my gypsy mother through his heartlessness to me. I flattered myself that I would know him, no matter where or when I met him, such was my hate for him; but I was wrong. Once I thought I had found him, and only after my dagger had almost taken his life did I realize my mistake and curse my blindness. The man I had followed so long was not the Roger Darrel who wrecked my life, but one to whom I owe much in the past. But my work is nearly done. The monster who wrecked my life still lives, and I have found him. Heaven be praised for this moment. Hold out your hand, scoundrel! Ho! the black gods! That is the last proof. Here the trail ends. For many weary months I have sought a demon in human shape, and now I have found him. You are the man!"

Her intensely black eyes were bent upon the form of the man before her, as

his brow was corrugated and his eyes flashed like little lightning.

"You waste your breath, Roger Darrel; false lover, base fiend! Here I am, resolved to avenge the past, and it is just as well for you, as I would never leave you in peace as long as I lived. Here is Barbara Merriles' blow for revenge!"

He saw that nothing he could say or do would keep her back; for the time being she was crazed with fury, and would have leaped at him had she known that certain death lay beyond, but neither by look nor movement did he let her see that he feared her.

All the terrible wrongs of the past must have rushed over the young gypsy girl and overwhelmed her, so that she hardly knew what she was doing, save that the object that had been the dream of her life for a long time back was in a fair way of being consummated.

She would have been no mean antagonist for any man in her present condition, for the fury in her heart had made her muscles like steel. Her lithe frame was drawn up to its fullest extent, and such a picture of supple grace could not well be found elsewhere.

With a cry like that of an enraged animal, the gypsy girl sprang forward. She had been closed to Captain Grant, and this movement would have hurled her form upon him had he remained in his old position—which he did not.

When he saw that time for action had arrived, and that the vengeful girl was coming at him like a tornado, the duelist Captain quickly stepped aside.

The movement was so abrupt that there was no time given Barbara Merriles to recover herself, and as a consequence, not meeting with the resistance she had expected in the shape of her foe, she tottered upon the very brink of the awful precipice.

Even then she might have recovered her equilibrium and saved herself, but it seemed as though it were fated she should perish, for the earth crumbled away beneath her weight, and, with a sharp cry, she went down.

When hope seemed indeed lost, a ray came to her, for her hands, thrown out with a clutch of despair, fastened upon a root that jutted from the face of the cliff at its very top. There she clung, unable to help herself, hanging between



THERE SHE CLUNG BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

though she would search him with the fire that was contained in them, while her right hand was raised, and the dexter finger pointed at her enemy as if she would send a poisoned dart to his heart.

"Yes, you are the man, the fiend, the demon who destroyed my peace. Deny it if you dare!"

The man laughed sneeringly.

"I have no choice left me, only to protest against the endearing adjectives you apply to my poor self. If you ask me plainly, am I the man who once thought he loved you, and finding out his mistake, deserted you rather than remain and bring you to more pain, I answer, I am he."

"Then you have pronounced your doom. Among the peaks of the Pyrenees I made my terrible vow to hunt you down to the death, even if it took years to accomplish it, and I have never forgotten that vow in the long time that has elapsed since then. I knew that fate would bring us face to face again, and time has proven how wise I was in my belief."

The keen stiletto of the gypsy girl flashed in the sunlight. To many a man the sight would have been one full of horror, for the Captain stood so close to the edge of a precipice that it seemed as though a touch would send him over, and the enraged girl was half-crouched, ready to fly at him like a panther.

Not a nerve of his frame trembled, and yet he knew full well his danger. At such a time every faculty was needed to save himself, and the soldier could not afford to give way to trembling. He even smiled in her face.

"I see you are like a tiger cat, and seek my life. Before you go a step farther I wish to warn you, girl, that the consequences will fall upon your own head. For the last time, Barbara, beware. If you come on, it will be to your death."

His face changed with the rapidity of lightning, and in place of the sneering smile had come a savage look, while his

life and death!

He could have saved her if he would. One exertion of his muscular power, and she would have been lifted to life. How could she have ever again attempted to slay him when this was the case?

But he was a man without a heart.

Kneeling down, he saw her face, white now from terror, the great black eyes looking up at him in a pleading way, but he even smiled sardonically, and uttering one word, "Farewell," walked a few paces away to where he could only see the small brown hands clutching the root in a death grasp. Then he turned his back upon the spot.

He heard no sound, no cry, but when he turned a few minutes later, the hands had vanished. Spite of his satanic nature, the arch plotter could not but feel the shudder that passed over his frame as, in his mind's eye, he saw the poor gypsy girl whirling down to the awful death below.

"It is over," he muttered between his teeth as he walked away with quick, nervous strides; "she sought her own doom. Would that Nora Warner had gone with her. My skies are brightening with the drawing in of the net!"

CHAPTER VI.

Carol Richmond suffered in silence. Though her heart seemed broken, she made no moan; but "still waters run deep," and her quiet manner was only evidence of the great pain within.

Nora Warner had met her one day in the woods, had told her the story of the perfidy of "Roger Darrel," and the story had almost killed her. So long as she simply believed that there had been a great mistake in his past life—that he had wedded a woman who had gone mad—she could still love him. After hearing what a horrible narrative Nora Warner had to tell, however, it seemed as though all the dreams of her young life were shattered.

She could not believe Roger guilty of such inhuman cruelties toward one who

had been such a good angel toward him, and who had given him such trusting love, and yet Nora Warner had been ready to stake her very soul upon it. She had borne none of the looks such as an insane person would be supposed to possess, and had, in fact, seemed singularly calm, except for the excitement caused by the telling of her story.

Conflicting doubts arose in the mind of the young girl, and she suffered quite as much from the uncertainty of knowing the truth as from the facts themselves.

She was not to be allowed to remain long in this state, however. Events were clustering about her own home that were destined to have much concern with her future.

Meanwhile Lawrence Richmond was like a tiger at bay. He was in the toils of the oppressor, and, although he squirmed under the yoke, he could do nothing but what the Captain wished.

The Captain knew full well how he was hated, but he was too bold and reckless to heed it much, and let events shape themselves.

The situation had not been a very pleasant one, menaced by those two women of the dead past as it had been; but he was a man who believed firmly in luck and fate, and something seemed to tell him that all would come out well.

So far as Barbara Merriles was concerned this had come true, for she would trouble him no more, unless her spirit could come back to haunt the man who had been the curse of her life, a thing that the Captain had no fear of.

Thus affairs were allowed to drift along in their own way, and the fatal hour drew near when the climax was to come.

The young girl felt her soul recoil in horror at the thought of making a sacrifice even for her father's sake, for he had given her to understand just about how it was.

Still it was not so bad as it might have been at a former time. Her heart lay dead within her, and she could not take half the interest in matters that she might otherwise have done, but yet the idea of marriage with that man was quite enough to horrify her.

There was one, however, whose interest in her never flagged, and that person was Roger Darrel. He knew she loved him, and if her scruples would not permit her to marry him he was at least determined that she should not be forced to marry another against her will.

There was one of the servants at the Terrace who had become aware of the love that existed between his young mistress and the master of Darrel Chase, and whom, some time previous, Roger had been in a situation to assist in a material way.

After that event Andrew had taken it upon himself to convey all that he saw and heard in reference to Miss Carol to Roger Darrel. He did not act in a mean manner, but, believing that his object was good, and that the end justified the means, he was continually on the lookout for something blighting on the case.

Thus the young master of Darrel Chase was aware of all things of importance that were transpiring at the Terrace. He learned, with great surprise and anger, of the plans that were being perfected for the speedy marriage of Carol.

Both the Captain and Lawrence Richmond would have been amazed could they have learned how much of their mutual understanding was known. Roger was quite well aware of the fact that the soldier duelist possessed a secret which he held over the head of Carol's father, and that this same secret was to be the "open sesame" to the old gentleman's treasures.

He knew that Carol hated this Captain Grant, whoever he might be, and he became firmly resolved that, if it must be the last act of his life, he would prevent the unholy marriage. Since words would be of no avail, he was ready to proceed to still stronger measures.

He remembered the story of young Lochinvar, who carried off his bride just when she was about to be married to another, and yet the cases were far from being parallel, for in this instance there was a barrier between them, and even though he saved Carol from such a fate, it would not bring them any closer together.

Meanwhile preparations were going on at the Terrace for the wedding of Captain Grant and Carol. The young girl had not spirit enough just then to resist. Her faith in Roger was not gone, but it had received a terrible shock, and this rendered her quiescent with the numb pain that filled her heart.

The preparations were not of a magnificent nature, for it was the Captain's wish that the ceremony should be quiet. What was his object in this, he, the man so full of display and love of ostentation, they could not comprehend; but Lawrence Richmond suspected that he was afraid some one who had known him in the past might learn of his whereabouts.

Filled with this idea, the Virginian made haste to have an announcement of the coming marriage in several different papers of Washington and Richmond. With rare cunning he also contrived to have a little item go the rounds of the press in reference to a vow the soldier had made years before, to always wear his left hand covered by a black kid glove.

"If that doesn't bring the Philistines down upon him, then all is lost."

So said the master of the Terrace to himself as he read some of the notices that were in the papers, and then carefully hid the sheets away for fear the Captain should alight upon them.

(To be continued.)

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