

VALERIE LOVELESS

Pure  
Romance

UNBROKEN  
*Promises*  
of  
THE HEART

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# VOLUME ONE

## *Marry Mary*

**R**everend Lyons was nearly sweating through his black tweed wool suit. He tugged on the collar of his fresh white shirt and hoped that no one would notice. The chapel was full, which made the room very warm. The bride was coming down the aisle, glowing and full of cheer, but Reverend Lyons hardly noticed because the most beautiful woman he had ever seen was sitting in the fourth row next to Elizabeth Latter. She resembled Elizabeth in many ways, like the way her nose turned up slightly but not too much, and the way her eyes moved when she smiled. She must have been about twenty-five years old, just a few years shy of him. Reverend Lyons reasoned it must be Elizabeth's sister, returned home from teaching in Florida for the last few years. He caught her gaze a few times. Embarrassed, she immediately looked down or away each time. Michael, the groom, took his bride, Mary, by the hand and turned toward her. The bride moved her hands awkwardly in professions of love via sign language.

Reverend Lyons did not notice that the organ stopped playing the wedding march. All he noticed was how lovely that woman's cheeks looked when flush. They were indeed flush, because the whole chapel had their eyes fixed on her, with wonder at what Reverend Lyons was gazing at.

"Ergh-hum," the bride coughed. Still, Reverend Lyons was lost in a sea of thoughts extending to his own wedding day with this beautiful creature.

Mary looked at Michael, who was looking at the woman. Then she followed his gaze. Reverend Lyons appeared to have been dazed by Harriet Black, Michael's sister and Mary's future sister-in-law.

"Reverend," she whispered. "Shall we start?"

Reverend Lyons came out of his stupor. "Sorry, er . . . um . . . Do you, Mary —"

"We haven't even said our vows!" Mary nearly shrieked.

"Forgive me. We are gathered here today, to wed this lovely young lady and gentleman together." Reverend Lyons's eyes darted back and forth from the young woman who had stolen his attention and dare say, his heart, and to Mary and Michael. "Mary and . . . and . . ."

Michael stepped up to the reverend and whispered in his ear, "Pull yourself together! We'll never hear the end of it if you don't." Michael nodded toward a wide-eyed and seething Mary.

Reverend Lyons took a quick, deep breath and proceeded. "Michael and Mary."

Mary smiled through gritted teeth and nodded at the reverend.

"It is through the grace of the Almighty that we are blessed with love on earth." He glanced at the young woman again, more longingly. "I hope we all can find the kind of love that you two share. Mary, after me please. 'I, Mary, take thee, Michael, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance; and pledge myself to you.'"

Mary said her vows flawlessly, and Michael did as well.

"I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride." Reverend Lyons smiled and glanced at the young woman one more time as she stood with the rest of the congregation and clapped for the new husband and wife.

After they kissed, Mary handed her bouquet of roses to her sister Sarah standing by her side, and she and Michael walked back down the aisle and out of the church. Liz had hurried out of the chapel. Waiting for Mary and Michael at the bottom of the church steps was a black carriage, decorated with vines and white roses. Before they climbed into the carriage, Mary turned to her best friend, Elizabeth, and grabbed her, pulling her close.

“Liz,” Mary cried. “We are sisters now!”

“Yes, I couldn’t ask for a better sister!” Liz threw her arms around the bride and cried.

“I heard that,” Harriet scoffed.

“Oh, Harriet, you are my favorite sister. Mary is our favorite sister-in-law!”

“I will concede to that,” said Harriet as she hugged the newest family member.

“I have to say, I think Reverend Lyons didn’t like the look of you,” Mary remarked.

Michael chimed in, “Reverend Lyons is ready for a family of his own, Harriet, and I do believe he has you in mind.”

“Oh, Michael, stop!” Harriet chided.

“Shh.” Peter, Liz’s husband, stepped in. “Here he comes.”

“Mary, Michael.” The reverend smiled. “I wanted to say congratulations. Would you introduce me to this new face?”

“Hello, Reverend, I’m Harriet Black.” She blushed but kept her composure.

“Harriet has returned to us for good, Reverend,” Mary said. “She was teaching in Florida but has come home.” Mary looked at Harriet questioningly. “To settle down, Harriet?”

Harriet melted with embarrassment. “Perhaps, mostly due to the inexcusable heat in Florida.”

“Well,” Reverend sang, “if there is anything I can do to ease your transition home, please let me know.”

“I will. Thank you, Reverend.” Harriet smiled and nodded politely, then quickly turned to give her brother and new sister a kiss before she slinked off to where she couldn’t be found.

“Mary, have a most wonderful time traveling. I will have your cottage ready for you when you get back!” Liz hugged Mary one more time.

“Liz, that is the sweetest gift. I really must insist that you rest and be well while I am gone. I will be able to do it myself when I return.”

“Rest? Whatever do you mean? I don’t need rest. I—”

Mary leaned in close to Liz’s ear. “Surely that baby is making you tired.”

“What? I—”

“Your dress. It’s so tight, you are turning blue.” Mary kissed Liz on the cheek before Michael helped her climb aboard the carriage. Liz stood still, dumbfounded and red faced.

“What’s the matter? What did she say to you?” Peter asked, taking her by the arm.

“Uh, nothing. She does say incredible things sometimes.”

“Yes,” Peter agreed as he escorted Liz home to their new little cottage attached to Mary and Michael’s soon-to-be little cottage on Fifth Avenue. Each Cape Cod cottage was a mirror image of each other, with each having a picket fence in front, a few front steps, and a blue door. The cottages were modest with two upstairs bedrooms, a washroom, and a small family and kitchen area. Out the back-kitchen door were a few lovely rolling hills that ended at the beach. The wind whipped the little houses day and night, and the roaring of the waves could always be heard.

Still contemplating what Mary had remarked, Liz sat down on her bed and sighed.

“What’s the matter?” Peter asked as he took off his tie and loosened his collar.

“Mary insinuated—no, implied—no, insisted that I am—”

“What?” he pressed.

“That I am fat!”

“What? That doesn’t sound like Mary.” He threw his jacket on the bed.

“She said my dress was so tight that I was turning blue!” Liz squealed as she stood and turned to the side, eyeing herself in the mirror. “Do I look too fat for my dress?”

“Of course not!” Peter started, but he stopped and studied her for a minute. “No . . . No! You look the same.”

“Peter!” Liz cried out. “You agree with her, don’t you!”

“No! No . . . maybe your corset is loose. I don’t think it’s you.”

“Peter, she thinks I’m expecting!” The words she didn’t want to say burst from her lips. Peter went silent. He stared at her for a long while and she at him. Finally, she looked down at her waist and put her hand on her belly as she began to laugh. “Peter! I’m expecting!”

“You are?” he asked, shock etched on his face. “You are!” He bounded over the bed to Liz and embraced her.

“How did Mary know before you?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t been feeling well. I just thought it was traces from the influenza I had last month. I didn’t even consider it could be a baby!”

“I’m going to be a father! I’m going to be a father! I need to go tell my father! And my mother! My mother needs to know I’m going to be a father!”

“Yes, yes, we will tell them soon, Peter!” Liz said as she pulled her husband close and rubbed her little belly with her hand.

Liz awoke in the middle of the night. She felt hungry and couldn’t shake the strange dream she had had about her story, *Enduring Promises of the Heart*, that she published weekly in the local *Gazette*. In her dream, John came to her and told her that she was his one true love, not Lavender. It felt so real, and in her dream, she cried tears of joy. She also slightly recalled pushing Lavender off a bridge to her death when she objected to John’s newfound love.

Unable to fall back to sleep due to her excitement about the baby and that gnawing hunger, she rose and went to the kitchen for a snack as quietly as she could, so as not to wake Peter. She opened the bread box and cut herself a piece of bread, then put a generous helping of butter and honey on it. She stood and looked out the kitchen window toward the sea while she munched her bread. Nothing tasted right. The bread didn’t satisfy her hunger and made her feel nauseous. But when she stopped eating it, her hunger pangs returned.

She could hear the waves crashing on the beach out yonder, and it made her think of one of her favorite characters, Captain Morose. His ship was floating carelessly off the coast, lights from his cabin twinkling in her mind’s eye. What about Morose? Who would ever love him? She loved him. He was dashing and charismatic in her mind, even though in the early days of the story she made him out to be a filthy, gold-toothed privateer. She had built him up in her mind as a gentler soul than originally taken. She felt her spirit urging her to make a mate for Morose. She would have to be very careful with it. She wouldn’t want to upset the fans, and she felt desperate for ways to drag on a storyline of keeping Lavender and John apart. That is what kept people reading, after all.

While she was up and had the lantern lit, she decided to sit and write. She had taken a break from *Enduring Promises of the Heart* after the wedding four months ago. After the botched wedding of John and Lavender, most people were not too happy with her and were eagerly awaiting her to start the story back up. But Liz just wanted to make her husband happy and create a home. She hadn't even thought much about writing until something about the wedding sparked some creativity inside of her.

She had been stopped so many times in the street by fellow townspeople and had been told what should happen next that she feared going out very often. But she was due to turn in a new volume in a few days, and she had not even started because Mary and Michael's wedding had kept her occupied. Mary had chosen Sarah as her maid of honor because she wanted Liz to enjoy her honeymoon and because she knew that Liz would easily forgive her if she did not choose her. Sarah, however, would never let Mary or her mother and father forget how her eldest sister had begrudged her the title of maid of honor. Liz didn't mind, having just finished her own wedding and being a very busy newlywed, starting her own home and moving. She was happy to not have the added stress and to sit in the pews with the rest of them.

She had thought about where she wanted the story to go since the wedding was interrupted by Captain Morose, but she was mostly hoping that when she sat down the words would flow to her like some other worldly flow, trickling into her mind. And so, she began where she left off.



*Lavender threw herself between John and Morose, landing hard on her knees in the sand.*

*“John, Morose,” she pleaded, hands in the air as if she could hold them back from killing each other with just her arms. “Please, it doesn’t have to be this way, we could talk—”*



“It’s been so long since the last volume came out . . . I better remind my readers about what happened last time,” Liz thought. So, she crossed it out and started again.



*Lavender stood between John and Morose. John held his blade up toward Morose, and Morose stood with his blade in hand but hung loosely at his side. Anxiety coursed through Lavender’s body and she shook.*

*She was in shock. Morose was alive. He had stopped her wedding!*

*“Morose. John.” Lavender held her hands up in peace. “It doesn’t have to be this way!”*

*“No, me girl, it does have to be this way.” Morose’s shipmen began to hoot and holler. “John’ll ne’er let yer go, and I can’t walk away from yer again!” Morose yelled over the encouraging shouts of his men.*

*“Morose, you know I can kill you as easily as cutting down a sapling!” John squared off with him again.*

*“No, Johnny boy, yer see, I’m a changed man!” Morose smiled and revealed shiny white teeth where once there were gold caps.*

*Lavender studied Morose for a moment. It was as if he had aged backwards and had lived a gentile life, rather than that of a seafaring pirate. His skin was not ravaged by the sun, and his eyes were bright and shiny.*

*Lavender faced Morose, coming between them, forcing John to lower his sword. “What happened to you?” she asked, her voice shaking. She studied this ghost of a man.*

*“I will tell yer, but only yer. Come aboard the Lily and I’ll tell yer everything yer wanting to know.”*

*“Never!” John roared, his neck muscles tightening and his fists clenching. “This is just a ruse to kidnap you!”*

*“John, please!” Lavender said as she glanced back at him. “This is the man who saved your life. He gave his life for yours! How could I not hear him out?”*

*John lowered his head. “Fine. Go!” He looked into her eyes, his intensity burning her soul. “I trust you to find your way back to me.” He sighed and put his sword in its sheath.*

*“Of course, I’ll come back to you. I promise.”*

*Morose gave a wickedly handsome grin and held out his hand to Lavender, who took it carefully. He led her to the dinghy and helped her climb aboard.*

*John watched as his should-be-bride disappeared to the Lily. An ominous feeling overtook him.*

*Aboard the Lily, Morose took Lavender’s hand and led her to his captain’s quarters. She had been there only once before. Right after Morose had died, his crew let her rest there. It looked cozier than it did before. It was lit with softer lighting, and there was a dining table and two chairs in the middle of the room. Upon the table was a small feast of fowl, bread, and fruit and a gold candelabra with eight glowing candles in the middle.*

*“Sit, me girl.” Morose led her by the hand to the table, but Lavender stopped, turned around, and looked Morose in the eyes.*

*“Morose—I—I wanted to—” She flung her arms around him and cried into his lapel. “You should be dead! I saw you die! You saved him, you saved me, but then you died!”*

*“Shh, me girl,” Morose cooed as he stroked her hair.*

*“Are you a ghost? You look different. You look . . . younger.” Lavender investigated his face, contemplating the freshness and glow of it.*

*“No, me girl, I’m not a ghostie. I’m alive, saved by mermaids me was. Sit,” he said as he pulled out the chair for her. She complied as she wiped a few tears from her face.*

*“I were sinking last I saw yer bonny face. So quickly I sank, I couldn’t see nothing at all. Me lungs burned and just before I were about to lose hope and die, I saw a wee light. Methought it were the tunnel to the great beyond. Maybe it were. But I saw a lovely face come near me, and she swirled the water with her hand and made a bubble which she placed upon me face. I breathed, me girl. I took in air and it smelled sweet, like a fresh sea breeze. I was warmed from my lungs to my toes. The sweet face became blurry behind the bubble of air, and I fell asleep, a peaceful sleep, like a wee babe.”*

*Lavender looked at him with disbelief. But if it hadn’t been for the fact that she had seen him drown, she would never have believed such a tale. Morose scooted his chair closer and took her hand.*

*“Then, I awoke in a cave and in the water near the rocks where I lay were the sweet face I’d seen. But only now, she looked fish-like and strange. Me body were too weak. I fell asleep again. She brought me raw fish, and I ate it with her for days. She, always staying in the water. And I couldn’t leave. The cave were submerged under the water, but for a tunnel that went above the waves and provided me with faint light and fresh air. She told me ’bout her people and how she longed to see the world above. She told me she could see it, if she were to leave forever and never return. I told her it weren’t worth it. I told her there were mostly violence—”*

*Morose gently took a strand of Lavender’s hair and twisted it around his finger as he looked longingly at her face. “And heartache above the waves. Then she asked me ’bout John. See, she saw me save him and wondered who he were to me, that I would give me life for him. That’s when I told her about yer. And how me love for yer compelled me to give me life, only to make yer happy.” Lavender listened intently and watched Morose speak. “She were so touched by me words. She wept and left me alone for three days. I was half starved by the time she returned. She told me how she wished for me to return to yer. She asked me if it were too late to claim yer. I didn’t care if it were or not! I wanted to get out of that cave and see yer face once again. She gave me a blob glowing blue, filled with liquid, and told me that if I were to eat it, I could swim and breathe under the water like her and I would be able to stay with her like that forever, or I could return to the surface. I chose the surface, of course, to be with yer again. It’s a miracle I made it just in time for yer vows. I pushed me men so hard, night and day to get here.”*

*Morose stood and pulled Lavender up to him by the hands. She was so close to him, she could smell the sea air on him. “Lavy, me girl, it meant to be that I arrived here just in time to stop yer from marrying Johnny boy. Don’t yer see?”*

*Lavender stared into his blue shining eyes, studying the unique depth of water they had taken on. She contemplated what he was saying. It was magical, enthralling. Perhaps it was even true, but she couldn’t run off with Morose just like that. It needed to be considered; the shock needed to wear off. She needed a clear head.*

*“Morose, I can’t. You gave your life for me to be with John!”*

*“And now I’m alive! It negates yer obligation to be with Johnny boy, surely!”*

*“Morose, I don’t know. I’m so confused! I am overjoyed that you are alive, but I don’t think I love you like that!”*

*“Yer do, Lavender, I can see it in yer eyes. I can feel yer heart longing for mine the way mine longs for yers!”*

*“Morose, please. I can’t decide anything tonight! It is my wedding day! Which you ruined, by the way!”*

*“Yer right. I’m deeply sorry. If I could have got me self here sooner, a more respectable distance from your wedding day, I would have.” He pulled a pearl on a strand of gold from his pocket. “I want yer to take this gift and think it over.” He lovingly tied it around her neck. “This be a gift, from the deep of the sea. Wear it and remember me.”*

*Morose put his hand gently on Lavender’s face and gave her a kiss. Lavender stumbled back a step. Without a word, she turned and left Morose alone in his cabin.*

*As one of Morose’s pirates escorted Lavender back to the beach, she saw John sitting on a sandy dune watching and waiting for her.*

*The pirate got out in the shallow water and pushed the dinghy as far up on the sand as he could and then carried Lavender the rest of the way to dry land. Her white wedding gown flowed in the evening breeze and glowed white from the moonlight. John immediately noticed the pearl floating around her neck.*

*“Come here,” he said as he whisked her into his arms and embraced her. “I was worried. You can’t trust Morose, no matter how changed he may be.”*

*“John, he says he was rescued by—a mermaid of all things.” Lavender fiddled with the pearl on her neck. It felt warm and smooth.*

*“Lavender, listen to me,” John said as he lifted her chin so she could meet his gaze. “Morose saved me, Morose saved you, but you don’t owe him your heart.”*

*“I—I—I want to show him my gratitude is all.”*

*“Good. I hope that will be the end of him.” John snorted. “Come, the reverend said he would marry us as soon as you return.”*

*“Oh, yes, of course. Look at me,” she said, stepping back and ruffling her skirt. “I’m a mess. Do you think he will wait until morning? My dress needs to be dried out, and my hair is all tangles.”*

*“I think you look more beautiful than ever.”*

*“Thank you, but I think we should reconvene in the morning. I . . .” Lavender put her hand to forehead. “I have a headache.” Then, uncharacteristically, Lavender swooned. John caught her and carried her home as he muttered expletives against Morose under his breath.*



“I cannot print this, Mrs. Latter,” Mr. Dixon said as he threw her manuscript of the latest volume of *Enduring Promises of the Heart* on his desk.

“Why not?” Liz exclaimed, eyes burning with anger.

“It’s too indecent, even for you.”

“Mr. Dixon, please! You are the one being indecent!” Liz said as she sat firmly in Mr. Dixon’s chair. He circled around his desk to stand beside her.

“Mrs. Latter, you have a bride kissing another man on her wedding day! Do you know how many letters a day I get about you? Or specifically your indecent material?”

“You never cared about it being indecent before! Especially not when you are strolling to the bank to make another deposit in your account.”

“I—I don’t appreciate that! Now, listen. I have received letter after letter of complaints and even threats. Threats, Mrs. Latter, because you did not wed Lavender and John in your last volume. That Clarence girl almost killed herself on your wedding day when she read it. She passed out right there on the floor and almost cracked her head.”

“Sarah is a halfwit, and she is always feigning a spell. This is literature, Mr. Dixon. It’s highs and lows, ups and downs, all for the drama! Surely you know this.” Liz threw a hand of dismissal at Mr. Dixon.

“I know it, but this is different. We need to keep the people happy if we want them to keep reading.”

“Where would I go next if they married? I’ll tell you, the doldrums of children and family would be next. The adventure would be replaced with diapers and sleepless nights.” Liz put her hand unconsciously on her belly. Mr. Dixon didn’t bother to notice.

“I can’t argue with you there, but if things don’t turn around soon, I may have to end your featurette.” Mr. Dixon puffed on his cigar and sighed as he

sat on the edge of his desk.

“No, you won’t! You could never go back to featuring recipes and Reverend Lyons’s diatribes on radical dress.”

Mr. Dixon puffed on his cigar some more and shook his head in defeat. “Now, what was it you came in here for?”

“I wondered if you had a position for my sister Harriet. She’s very well educated—a teacher. She would make an excellent assistant editor.”

“Yes, Harriet. She was sending me articles occasionally for the paper. I never received a letter of complaint about them.” Mr. Dixon wagged his finger at Liz.

“Indeed, and you never sold a paper because of them either.”

“As always, Mrs. Latter, you have outwitted me. If I didn’t feel so fondly of you, I would have thrown you out of my office a long time ago.”

“Mr. Dixon! I am blushing!” Liz smirked and gently touched her cheek with the back of her fingers sarcastically.

“Indeed, I do have a position for Harriet. Perhaps she can help me control you.” Mr. Dixon raised one brow.

“Very good. When can she start?”

“First thing.”

“Excellent!” Liz chimed as she jumped up from her seat and headed toward the door. “Now print that! I know where my story is going, and it’s going to sell more papers than ever.”

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