

A Terrible Tangle.

CHAPTER XI.

BETH'S HOME-COMING.

His desire to punish her faded away, and he gave her boundless pity in its place.

He had always known that her sister was very dear to her, but not until she had spoken so heartbrokenly about Lill had he understood how great that love had been.

The knowledge that they were both bereft of what had been the sweetest thing in their existence made a bond between them, but this was the only tie. For the knowledge that Elizabeth loved another man with such a boundless, unquestioning love drove Barostan far away from her.

And yet it was positive torture to the man to separate himself from this woman. His love for her had been bitter, passionate, almost cruel. When she had been the disdainful stranger, he had loved her almost against his inclination; but now that he had been in close contact with her for these few hours, and she had unconsciously revealed to him how beautiful her nature was, his love was softened and purified, and, by the very strength of that new love, he sought to shelter her, to save her, if possible, from more suffering.

Only a few days after his arrival in London, David had learned that his granduncle had died in Buenos Ayres, where he had lived for many years, leaving all his property to his grandnephew. David instantly decided to go to South America, and, before he left England, perhaps forever, he felt impelled to bid Beth good-by.

He had hastened down on an early morning train, and walked swiftly after alighting toward Beth's dwelling. As he was passing through the orchard he overheard voices, Beth's and Ottershaw's. A jealous rage flamed in his heart, and he drew near to listen. He learned that Ellen was with Beth and then Ottershaw said abruptly:

"Why did you do this thing? Why did you treat me so shamefully?"

She winced.

"I wrote to you," she said, in a low voice. "I told you it was best to forget, that everything had been too hurried—that I—we—had made a great mistake."

"You wrote me this—yes," said Ottershaw, "though I did not get the letter, by some fiendish trick of fate, till that very night that brought you to my house as my new agent's wife; but this was not the truth," he said, in that same fierce way. "When I told you of my love, when you gave me your love in return, you had no qualms; you are not going to tell me, Elizabeth, that her conventionality could act so disastrously upon your love as this letter suggested. Did we not both recognize that our love was spontaneous and pure—no passing fancy, but a deep and enduring passion? What madness, then, made you act as you have done?"

"I said I would listen to you," said Elizabeth, and her voice amazed her. It was so steady; "but to listen is not to answer. Believe me, I can give you



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no explanation. If—if you wish to think the hardest thing of me, I may not utter a word to excuse myself. Instead—she caught her breath—"I recognize that you have the right to reproach me; more than that I cannot say."

"But that will not satisfy me," said Ottershaw, in that same quiet way. "Do you not realize, Elizabeth, that in having taken my love, in having given me yours, in having promised yourself to me, you still belong to me?"

She answered wildly, and Ottershaw left her with a smile of triumph on his lips, maddening to the man standing in the background. David's first impulse was to rush forward and address her brutally. But the new love in him stilled his passion. He left her in peace. Later in the evening he went to the house and saw her. He told her of his intention to go to South America.

"Are—are you going abroad," Elizabeth asked, in a low voice. "really because of business, or—because of me?"

"There is real business," he answered her, calmly, "but I will be quite frank with you. I have come to the conclusion that it would be absolutely impossible for us to live, placed as we are now, within close distance of one another. I cannot undo the wrong I have done you, Elizabeth, but I can lift a little of the burden, and I believe that you will grow more reconciled if you are protected from any chance of contact with me."

Elizabeth stretched out her hands to him.

"You are wrong," she said, in a choking voice, "quite wrong. It is a strange thing to say, perhaps, but I feel that everything would be a little—easier if—if you were somewhere near. You have been cruel, but that is over, and now I know that you can be kind—very, very kind. And then," Elizabeth said, slowly, "placed as we are, it seems to me—that—it—is—our duty to do the best we can for one another."

He took her hands, and had she been less agitated she would have felt that strong hand tremble as it closed around hers.

"I am going to try to do what I think best for you, Elizabeth," he answered. "It has been a miserable

business, and I know that I can never give you back that happiness that I destroyed so ruthlessly; but you are young—hardly more than a child." His voice grew hoarse. "Happiness is bound to come to you again, and I want my hands to be the hands that will guide that happiness to you."

Elizabeth pressed a little to him. Vaguely it came to her at this moment that there was a vast difference between the two loves that were lavished upon her. It was not as a woman turning to a man that she turned to him; it was rather as a child turning to a protector.

The remembrance of that marvelous care that he had given to his brother came to her now, and drove away from her both the fear and the personal repugnance that had oppressed her.

"If you wish to give me back my happiness," she said, "you will not begin by going so far away."

"What have you in your mind?" asked Barostan, abruptly, his hand gripping hers fiercely for an instant.

"I will tell you," answered Elizabeth. "I think we ought to share our lives together. Perhaps not immediately, but in a little while. I am your wife, you are my husband, and husband and wife should have their joys and sorrows together."

He let her hand drop and laughed—something of his old, bitter laugh.

"Are you comparing us to the ruck of married people?" he asked. "I forced you to be my wife, and you submitted—not because you feared me for yourself, but because you feared injury I might do your sister. Is that a good basis upon which to begin life together?"

And then, with a return of that fierce jealousy, he continued: "Moreover, I would never be content—I could never consent to live beside you merely as a friend, a counselor; and you, though you may think it now in a moment of emotion, are not prepared to give me more than this. No," he abruptly added, "we can have no life together!"

Then he had gone on to speak composedly of his business arrangements, his solicitors and various other details of his departure, and finally had left her. Beth felt strangely depressed at his going, and Ellen, who had seen him as he was leaving, was strongly moved to detain him. And many and many a time afterward Ellen Griffin recalled that impulse with acute regret.

The next day it was too late. David had gone to London, and in a few days he was on the deck of a vessel bound for South America. Before he left England, however, he took one step significant of his attitude toward Beth. While walking across London Bridge one night he rescued from drowning one of those poor women of whom London is full—heartbroken, soul-riven, friendless, poor; no wonder they seek the river as the final solution of their problems. The girl had been revived and taken to the police station, where she had told, or, rather, her roommate had told, a pitiful story of poverty, hard labor, a black life. David gave the unfortunate creature a letter to his wife, asking Beth to give her aid and comfort.

The months crept by. Ellen remained with Beth until the fall, when she was obliged to hurry off to make some long-delayed visits. Scarcely had she gone when Mark appeared and gradually came to be Beth's companion. He had sworn to have her whole heart, and with all the craft of his nature he sought that end slowly but surely. Then, when he had become the companion of her days and the hero of her dreams, he left suddenly, and it seemed to Beth as though the life of the world had ceased. Then Ellen came back, and on the following day, as they were walking along the country road, they met Mark and Lill. Beth turned her back, and hastened off to London on the following day. There business had detained her, and when she did come North she traveled with Lady Ottershaw, who was to stay with her son at his hunting lodge near Beth's home, and at the station she met him, smiled formally and was gone before he knew it.

CHAPTER XII.
David's Messenger.

Elizabeth had returned to that little home in the North because of a communication that she had received from her husband's lawyer.

HIS BLADDER WAS TERRIBLY INFLAMED

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Larder Lake, Ont., March 26th.
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The letter went first North, and then was sent South to Mrs. Griffin's house in London.

Mr. Gooch wrote to her on his own account.

It appeared that Barostan was in need of certain papers which were not to be found in the documents which were in Mr. Gooch's hands; and the lawyer had suggested to Elizabeth that she should look through a certain old bureau and see if she could find the papers in question.

Acting on the impulse of the moment, Elizabeth went to give a personal answer to this letter; and it was not until she had sat in Mr. Gooch's office that she realized that it would be pleasant to her to have some direct information about David Barostan.

The lawyer, however, could give her very little news beyond telling her that Barostan had reached his destination, and that his uncle's legacy to him exceeded anything that he had imagined possible; he could give her no other information.

He was very agreeably impressed by Elizabeth, and more especially in her desire to do anything in her power to assist his client. He had not expected to see so young and fair a woman, and she set his brain working to explain the mystery of this marriage.

"I am going back North at once," she said, "and I will search without delay."

"I cannot help thinking that you will find the papers where I have suggested," Mr. Gooch said. "I remember that your husband's mother received a great many communications from South America when she was living in that house. If you like, Mrs. Barostan, I will send some one up there. You can give the keys to one of my clerks, and he can save you this journey."

Elizabeth colored hotly.

It was the first time she had been called by her rightful name. It rang with a strange sound in her ears.

"No," she said, hurriedly, "I would rather go myself."

(To be continued.)

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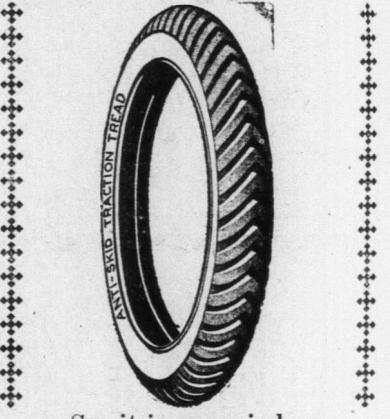
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