

MAGIC BAKING POWDER

THE STANDARD AND FAVORITE BRAND.

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A Terrible Tangle.

CHAPTER XII.

David's Messenger.

Mrs. Griffin parted with her reluctantly, and spoke out for the first time just before they departed.

"Now look here, Beth," she said, "don't, for goodness' sake, worry yourself! I know what you are, you will fret yourself into fiddlestrings about Lil, and imagine that it is your bounden duty to protect her in some way or other. Lil is no longer a child, and believe me, my dear, she is far better able to take care of herself than you are yourself. As for Mark," and then Mrs. Griffin had stopped hurriedly, and turned away; then she came back again. "A woman can be a match for a man any day if she sets herself the task," she said then in her dry way. But there was a wistful tone in the older woman's voice as she kissed Elizabeth and put the vital question to her.

"Do you care for him so very, very much, Beth?" she asked.

Elizabeth paused before answering, then she spoke the truth.

"I don't know, Ellen," she said, in a low voice. "I will tell you all I feel. When he came into my life at Heathcote I thought I had reached heaven. Then—then—I lost him—I fought an awful fight with myself before I let his love go, but I did it, and I said 'good-by' to it, and I thought it was all over, and then came all the rest. That strange, that horrible meeting at Mavro, and then his unexpected coming to the little farm, and then all those days just before you came when we used to meet and talk I hardly know what about! Ellen, they were very dangerous, those days. And if he had not gone away, and if you had not come—I—I don't quite know what would have happened to me. But since I have been away with you here, I have grown stronger. I am able to think about him, and I believe I understand him a little bit. He did love me, Ellen, but it is not real love that brings him to me now. He is such a proud man, and I hurt him so deeply. He wants to make me suffer if he can, and he means to do this by any way in his power."

Mrs. Griffin looked at her eagerly in the face.

"But must you suffer, Beth?" she asked. "Can't you be strong? Is the power he wields over you so great? Away from him you can be sensible; can you not have this strong armor of sense when he is near?"

"I am going to test myself," Elizabeth said, with a faint, a very faint smile.

That meeting with Lady Ottershaw, and the rencontre with Ottershaw himself at the end of her journey was a sharp test. Yet she drove away from the station almost eagerly, and when she was alone in that quaint little house she felt so absolutely at home, so tranquil, so shut away from all the former turmoil of thought that she was almost happy.

She soon found the escritoire about which Mr. Gooch had spoken, and coming across a quantity of old papers she packed them up into one bundle and determined to send them by the early post.

It gave her an extraordinary sense of pleasure to do this small task, and when this was accomplished she wandered into the old kitchen and almost unconsciously she began to question the old housekeeper, and set listening with the keenest interest to all the stories of David Barostan's childhood which this old woman had tucked away in her memory.

The next morning, when she was writing a long letter to Ellen Griffin the housekeeper came to her to know if she would see Lord Ottershaw.

Elizabeth bit her lips and turned pale for an instant, and then she arose calmly.

"Please ask Lord Ottershaw to come in," she said.

She had a proud, almost a noble look as she stood in the old-world room, clad in a gown of serge, and Lord Ottershaw paused a moment before entering.

The way she advanced to meet him, holding out her hand, both checked and annoyed him; and as he glanced wistfully about him and realized in that glance that this home in which Barostan had put her, simple though it was, was in every way a fitting place for her, his annoyance became anger.

"I won't sit down," he said, hardily; indeed, his whole aspect was hard. Lord Ottershaw to-day looked his full age; there was something unconsciously about his expression.

"I am only here to say a few words to you, Elizabeth," he said. "You must forgive me if I go straight to the point. There is very little good to be gained by beating about the bush. You know how I am a man of determination. I wish you to understand therefore, that I am making arrangements for our marriage to take place as early as possible next year."

Elizabeth trembled and turned a shade paler, then she drew herself up.

"I am afraid I don't understand you," she said, very coldly; her tone almost as hard as his.

"Don't you?" he answered, shortly.

"Oh, I see what is in your mind. You are regarding your present position in the sight of a barrier. Of course, a woman of your sentiment would naturally regard it, and legally, I, too, recognize it as a barrier, but I am here to tell you what to do. You must at once instigate proceedings for a definite, legal separation, and if you follow my instructions the matter can be carried through successfully. I have means at my disposal," said Lord Ottershaw, quietly, "that will considerably assist us. You have merely to

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put forward as a plea the fact that you were coerced by violent threats to become this man's wife, and the matter will be settled very quickly."

Elizabeth sat down.

"It is very good of you to take so much trouble on my behalf," she said; "but I absolutely refuse to follow such a line of action as you advise."

"Of course you are talking nonsense," said Ottershaw, with a disagreeable smile; "far better to fall in to my views a once, Elizabeth. You have to understand that I was not jesting when I told you I regard you as belonging to me. I have further instructions to give you. You will leave here, and you will live with my mother. You require conventional protection, and you could be with no one better than my mother."

Elizabeth passed one hand over her brow, and then arose again.

"I beg," she said, "that you will never say these things to me again. They are unworthy of you, they are humiliating to me."

"Was it unworthy of me to offer you my love? Was it humiliating for you to listen?" asked Ottershaw, bitterly. He advanced toward her. "I see that you have garbed yourself with little of Ellen Griffin's objectionable strength. I see that you think that you are powerful enough to stand against me, but you are mistaken, Elizabeth."

Elizabeth gave a sigh of weariness.

"It is not Ellen—it is yourself who brace me up. Let us end this at once and for all. I did listen to your love, and I did love you! That week we were together just before you went away, I was very near to loving you better than in the beginning, but you woke me up from that dangerous dream, and many, many things have helped to clear my vision, till now, as we stand here together, I realize, strange to myself also, that the love I had for you was but an imaginary thing—a feeling born of various emotions and having no definite existence. What you said to me this morning does more to separate me from that dream than anything you could have done."

"It is not yourself who speaks, Elizabeth," he said, when he could not hold his voice. "It is that cursed interloper, Ellen Griffin, who has coached you in this part. If you were natural and true to yourself you would turn and give me your two hands, you would stand and face the world beside me, but you are not true. Like every other woman, you must play a part, you must trick and deceive and ver"—his tone was now steady and it was hard again—"at last we understand another! You have your views, I have mine. I am a man who has never yet been thwarted, and I am not going to let myself be set aside as easily as you imagine. You belong to me, and if you will not take the necessary steps to make the path clear for becoming my wife, then"—he laughed—"you will come to me in another fashion."

"You gave yourself to me," he said, passionately; "you are no longer free to do what you like with yourself! Then he changed his tone. "You are foolish, Beth," he said, quietly. "All my friends can tell you that I am the best of fellows if I am dealt with fairly, but there are a few scattered about the world who have had cause to know me as an enemy, and if you ask my character of these you will perhaps understand how foolish you are to try to put your will against mine."

"I have no wish to fight you," said Elizabeth, as she drew her hand away from him. "nor can I permit you to threaten me. It is absurd, Lord Ottershaw, to take this tone. How many women have you made love to in your time? How many women have played at love with you? Do you control the lives of every one of those who have afforded you an hour's amusement?"

"What passed between us," answered Ottershaw, quietly, "is absolutely different to anything that has come in my life before. You had it in your hands, Elizabeth, to make me a good man, and you have chosen, instead, to send me to the devil."

A cry broke from Elizabeth's lips.

"Oh, that is so wrong, so cowardly," she said. "Can you not be good of your own free will? Why must you be shown your duty by some one else? Oh indeed, and indeed you do me a great wrong; and if anything were needed to prove to me how mistaken I have been in you, you now give me this proof. I ask you to leave me," Elizabeth went on, calming herself by a great effort. "I have no more to say to you. From my heart I'm sorry that we should have ever met, but if you intend to deal with me bitterly I must suffer whatever comes. (To be continued.)



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