

# A Terrible Tangle.

CHAPTER XVI.

David's struggle With Conscience.

"If I can—what is your question?" "Will you answer me one thing, Ottershaw?" he asked, in a low voice. The latter looked at him keenly. "Are you really a friend of David Barostan?" "For an instant Ottershaw looked as if he could have struck Malcolm, then he laughed. "Indeed I am," he answered; "why do you doubt this? Believe me, my dear Jim, the task you are about to undertake for me is based on the purest sentiment of friendship. I cannot tell you all—that is Barostan's own secret—but I will tell you this much, he has been the victim of a terrible mistake, and it is altogether for his good that he should not be permitted to come back here—at all events, just yet. Will that satisfy you?"

"Yes," said Malcolm, and he turned away, leaving Lord Ottershaw to look after him with a deep frown on his face, which vanished, however, as he gave a laugh of triumph and realized that the game was altogether in his hands now.

Life went slowly, almost drearily, with David Barostan, despite the fact that he now possessed the means to wait himself where he wished, or satisfy any of those old ambitions which had filled his mind so actively in the past.

His wealth gave him at once a position, and he was run after, flattered and envied just as much in this far-off city as he would have been in the heart of fashionable London.

But the knowledge that he was now so important made very little difference to him. Indeed, it appealed to the man at times in a humorous light. Few of the women who admired him so freely, and found him so distinguished and handsome in appearance, would have recognized him if he had transformed himself to his old likeness, and shown himself as he had been, shabby and uncouth, with a slouching gait, and a look of bitterest enmity toward all the world.

Yes, it brought a smile to the man's lips to realize that he was now something a little less than a king, and that the world was open to him to find its best, if he chose to look for it.

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disappointing. In vain the loveliest eyes looked into his; in vain the most costly Parisian garments were donned in his honor; in vain were parties arranged, or social gatherings got together. He would have none of these things. He contented himself with living in the somewhat modest house in the heart of the city, where his granduncle had lived; and while the rich and fashionable betook themselves to their various quintas or country houses, he remained faithful to the city.

His one delight was the arrival of the English mail, with its letter from Richard Gooch. His only happiness was to sit down and dream over the girl-woman—for to him Elizabeth appealed in both these ways—who bore his name, and was, according to the lawyer, seemingly so anxious and glad to do anything that would be pleasant to him.

Richard Gooch was unsparing in the expression of his admiration for Elizabeth; it was evident she had gone very directly to his heart.

He gave Barostan each time a brief report of all that Elizabeth was doing, and the man's imagination readily filled in the picture.

From newspapers sent by the lawyer, Barostan learned that his wife was destined to be a social success, and possibly a social power. It stirred his heart when he read her name, and found her described as "beautiful" or "lovely."

Who could know her loveliness better than he?

Sometimes when he slept he would dream of that one night when they had been so near to one another at Mavro Castle; he would see that little rustic bridge crossing the rushing mountain stream, and he would look at that vision of Elizabeth standing in the moonlight, wrathlike in her clinging draperies, with her small, white, tender feet like snowflakes resting on the grass, and her eyes appealing to his for pity.

It was when he remembered for whom she had sought that pity that Barostan's old self leaped into life again.

He dared not let himself dwell too much on the remembrance of his rival; if he did he had an insensate rush of anger against him, and a terrible feeling of fear for the future.

At such moments he recalled his parting with Elizabeth with a pang, and almost cursed himself because he had steeled himself against her entreaty to remain.

Yet he was just to himself also.

"She did not know what she asked," he would say to himself sometimes. "How I remained, it would have meant misery to us both—for I am not made of the stuff to suffer patiently, and the knowledge that she wanted me, simply because duty, and perhaps fear, told her she ought to ask this, would have maddened me. It is bad enough here, with a very world between us, but how should I have endured this kind of suffering? How have I fought against the desire to master her—to claim her love? No—I did well! A thousand times rather life as it is, all empty and meaningless than such a mockery as that life together that she pleaded for would have signified.

Nevertheless, the longing to see her at times was almost too great, especially when Mr. Gooch wrote that it seemed to him as if Elizabeth was anything but strong. Barostan winced at the mere suggestion that she should be ill—how clear his memory was of her! How marvelously, how beautifully strong Beth had seemed in the past—but he felt that he had the solution to this problem. "she is fighting a hard battle," he

said to himself, "and, who knows? perhaps Ottershaw is making the struggle worse. He will not, relinquish her without a mighty effort. If I could feel that I righted the wrong I have done—it would be easy for me to wipe myself out altogether. The world is very large—a man can die and yet live if he chooses to set about and find out the way. But I must be satisfied about him—I must be forced to realize his real merit before I will go under. She belongs to me so far, and I will not forego that claim unless I know that a union with Ottershaw will mean happiness to her in the fullest sense of the word."

Richard Gooch wrote very often. Once he sent a flat and square package, which, when opened, revealed a photograph of Beth.

"I have stolen this from my wife's table," wrote the lawyer.

David Barostan sat and held the portrait in hands that trembled.

How lovely she was! How sweet! A thousand times lovelier and sweeter even than that vision enshrined in his heart.

He had never seen her dressed as she was in this latest portrait. She wore a black evening gown, and the soft lace was drawn ficu-like across her graceful bust. Her neck and throat were undecorated, her hair waved in its natural fashion away from her brows, and was massed abundantly in one great coil near the nape of her neck.

He remembered when he had sat gazing at her sleeping in the inner room that bygone morning at Mavro Castle. Miserable and perplexed as his heart had been, he had been unable to resist a sensation of amazement at sight of those masses of bright brown hair tossed on the pillow.

It was good of Richard Gooch to have sent him this portrait.

It made his life less lonely in one respect, though, on the other hand, it awakened longings and desires that he was doing his best to crush, if not subdue altogether.

It became evident to Barostan that his lawyer was working not unskillfully to bring Elizabeth and himself together. Mr. Gooch lost no opportunity of repeating to his client, in each letter he wrote, some fresh trait illustrating Elizabeth's sympathy and womanly nature, thereby provoking Barostan to smile faintly. For he needed no man to tell him that Beth was rarely womanly, and possessed the noble gift of sympathy to its full extent.

In a letter that came when the portrait arrived, Mr. Gooch wrote of the negotiations for the purchase of the Glen Farm, making Barostan's heart thrill as he read.

Elizabeth had only done what he had intended to do himself, but that did not take away from her action a sweetness of thought which disturbed the man very deeply. And this was not all that she was doing. One of the first things she had done, when money had come to her, had been to ask Mr. Gooch to obtain for her, if possible, all the manuscripts left behind by poor Basil Barostan. She judged, and rightly, that such things would be guarded by the lawyer among the Barostan papers. And such proved to be the case.

Some of Basil's music had already been published, but the mass of his work had to be given to the world, and this Elizabeth had at once determined should be done; more than this, she was resolved that the music should be heard as well as printed.

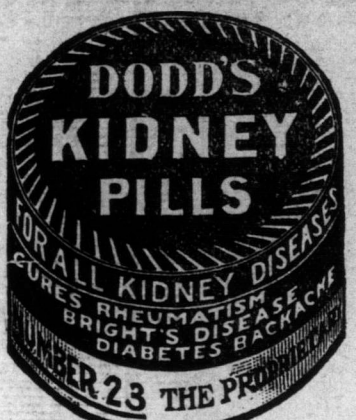
"She has thrown herself into this heart and soul," wrote Richard Gooch. "I have just been to see Mrs. Barostan, and she is full of excitement because she has practically settled for a performance of one of the most important compositions in town this winter."

David Barostan crumpled up this letter and read no further.

Mention of Basil's name still had power to burn, to torture, and at this moment it was the miserable circumstances that hung about his brother's memory that filled his mind, not the fragrance of the womanly tenderness, the delicate thought, that was evinced in this work Elizabeth was doing.

His latest phase of feeling for her passed from him for a time, and he let the old sense of wrong, the resentful anger, have sway with him once again.

He put aside that portrait with its tempting loveliness, and was guilty



of a sneer at Richard Gooch's expense and at his own.

"We men are all alike!" he said, bitterly. "A soft voice, a pleading look, and that subtle charm which makes a woman at once so evil and so angelic, can work us away even from the strongest duty, the most just hate. And have I not just cause to hate Elizabeth—is she not that flaxen-haired little devil's sister? Why do I let myself forget that? There are some things that should never be forgotten, and this is one. I must have been mad that summer night when I spoke to her," he said to himself, on another occasion. "I wish to God I had never gone near her."

The fact was that the man had too much time to himself. His days were spent in this kind of retrospection, it would have been far better for him had he been compelled to work very hard to put bread in his mouth; wealth and luxury had no charm for him, the glitter and glamour of gold no attraction.

Often he would stroll down to the lower quarters of the town, and watch the working population with something like envy at his heart.

That strange idea of disappearing clung to him persistently.

(To be continued.)

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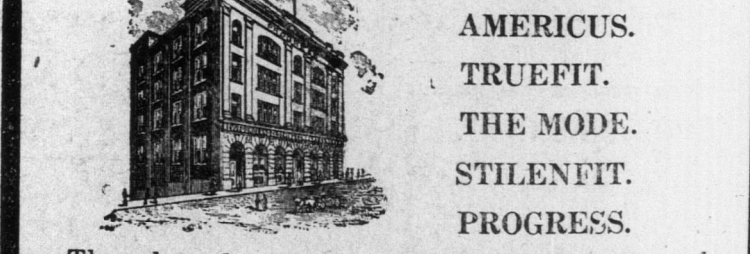
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