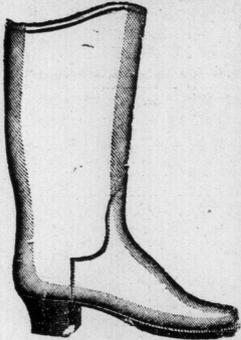


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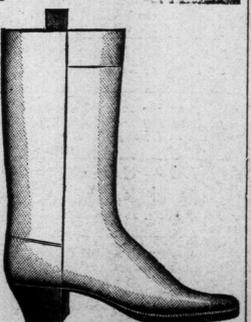
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**A Terrible Tangle.**

CHAPTER IV.

(Continued.)

The restless night, the misery of her thoughts, the foreboding that weighted her, took from her strength and appetite.

She could not bear to sit and listen to her aunt's chatter. She found a corner in the shadows of the drawing room, and she was lying with her eyes closed and an air of intense fatigue upon her when the door was opened, and Lord Ottershaw was announced.

He had expected to find her sad and tired, but he was not prepared to find her so wan and so prostrate.

He entered so softly that Elizabeth hardly knew that anyone was near her till she opened her eyes with a start and saw him before her.

For one brief spell her spirit seemed loosened from its newly forged bonds.

A wild sensation of delight ran through her. It seemed to her as though trouble dropped away when she looked at him, and she was not in the least conscious of how eloquent her face was, nor how much she seemed to reveal to the man who looked at her so eagerly.

It was a new sentiment that had taken possession of Ottershaw. Till he had seen Elizabeth, he had been an idler, a man who had trifled with the serious side of life, and for whom all women possessed a certain charm. Rich, popular, splendidly endowed intellectually, there was very little that such a man could not have achieved if he had tried to exert himself, but he had been quite content to saunter through life and to cherish no deep or disturbing emotions.

His love for his mother had been perhaps the best thing about him; now this was changed. He loved suddenly, almost unreasoningly, and yet with full reason. In Elizabeth he saw the woman who embodied the ideal of his childhood. Twenty-four hours before he would have laughed at the idea of sacrificing his liberty.

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"No," she answered.

"Have you thought of me?" he asked, eagerly, passionately. Has the same dream come to you? Has it seemed possible to you that we were destined to meet—that our lives were destined to come together?"

She flushed and trembled.

"I have thought of you," she said, in a low voice, "and—and it has seemed to me that you were something more than a stranger."

With an exclamation of delight, Ottershaw bent his head and kissed her hands; then he went on speaking rapidly:

"I have been waiting for this all my life; I never sought love, for something seemed to tell me that it would come at its proper time; and when I saw you passing out of the early sunshine yesterday morning, sweet and fair, and fresh, like the dew and the dawn, I knew that I had met my love. Elizabeth, you will not send me away from you. I—I won't expect you to give me your love just yet. I will be patient, but I must see you. You are as needful to me as the sun to the flowers."

Elizabeth looked at him, and her whole soul passed into her eyes. He came at the very moment when such happiness seemed

impossible, when her spirit sank within her for fear of the future; was it not natural that she should yield to the sweet influence of this moment? She loved him; she had known it the night before. Her heart repeated the words he spoke, and, strange as it might seem to others, to her it was but a natural working out of fate that they should meet and understand one another so quickly.

She clung to him. "Is it true?" she asked him, in a dreamy voice; "are you really speaking; are these things written in your heart or is it still a dream? It—will be so cruel to—to play with me. For I see now that you are more to me than love—you are my life!"

Murmuring he scarcely knew what, Ottershaw drew her slowly into his arms and kissed her brow and beautiful hair, and he put forward all the tenderness in his nature to soothe her.

She was to him so young, so childlike in this moment, and his spirit experienced for the first time in his life a sense of responsibility, he who had played at love, and had the reputation of not knowing what the word "heart" meant, felt his whole being swell with a thanksgiving for this precious blessing that had been bestowed upon him. And Elizabeth yielded herself to the tender beauty of this moment.

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erty, and now to him the one thing the world could give him was this woman as his wife.

There was such an element of goodness about Elizabeth, such dignity and purity, and yet no coldness.

She would be chaste in her love, but never a prude.

Seeing her face change and her lips quiver at the sight of him, Lord Ottershaw lost his head a little. He bent over and drew her out of the chair.

"You are glad to see me, then," he said. "I have been holding myself back all the morning because I felt I might be an intruder, Elizabeth. How strange is life!" he went on; "the whole universe seems changed since yesterday. I suppose I ought to be a stranger in your life, yet it seems to me as if I have come to a kingdom which was waiting for me all this time."

He still held her hands, and he felt them tremble in his.

"You look so tired," he said, "and yet you were so brave yesterday. I watched you, I adored you, but I was jealous of you—yes, jealous. Is it presumptuous of me to say much? I—I wanted you to look at me as you looked at your sister. I wanted your tears to fall for me as they fell for her. Elizabeth"—his voice was unsteady—"what pell is this that you have woken about me? I—I cannot live away from you."

She listened like one indeed under a spell. That first impression of acute relief, of protection which the sight of him had wrought to her deepened.

The misery, the anguish of those long, leaden night hours vanished—she saw nothing but his love-laden eyes, heard nothing but the love-music in his voice, and so they stood, heart beating in response to heart for a long moment; then, as she would have drawn aside from him, he seemed to awake.

"You are not angry with me?" he said, and then Elizabeth found her voice.

"No," she answered.

"Have you thought of me?" he asked, eagerly, passionately. Has the same dream come to you? Has it seemed possible to you that we were destined to meet—that our lives were destined to come together?"

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For a time trouble was shut away from her even Lil and her heartless wrongdoing faded from her mind. It was the most supreme moment of her life, and Elizabeth did homage to it.

An hour slipped away in that fragrant, shadowed drawing-room.

Ottershaw would not let her talk; he put her back in the chair and sat beside her, and ketched out in a graphic way he life they would live together.

"You shall not lose this dear old place," he said; "we will come to it when we want to be quite to ourselves, but we will see other lands, Elizabeth. I have been everywhere, and yet I have seen nothing. It will all reveal itself to me through your eyes."

And she listened like one enraptured.

When he arose to go, he told her that he would not be able to see her for a day or two.

"I promised my mother," he said, "to go north and see to some matters connected with her property. I ought to have

gone yesterday. If I do not go, she, dear thing, will insist upon taking a very fatiguing journey."

"You will go," said Elizabeth, in her gentle way, and yet even as she spoke the words she began to feel that the atmosphere was changed, that this glorious golden sunshine of love would fade behind a cloud.

When he spoke of telling his mother, she found her voice.

"No, no," she said; "not yet—it seems so soon. Perhaps she would not understand."

(To be continued.)

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