

# A Terrible Tangle.

CHAPTER XVI.

## David's struggle With Conscience.

"I don't know what you will say to me, Mr. Malcolm," he said, "but I am afraid you will be inclined to think me a very extraordinary person. I had hoped to entertain you for some time but my English letters have just come to hand, and I have received a most urgent summons, which will take me back to the old country as soon as I can go. I beg, however, that you will make this house your headquarters as long as you stay in Buenos Ayres."

James Malcolm paused only a moment.

"I am at a loss to know how to thank you, Mr. Barostan," he said, "but, as I was explaining to you a little while ago, I really had no intention of remaining here beyond a day or two. I want to be on the sea again. Had you not, however, over-persuaded me," he added, with a faint smile, "I should have been off again immediately."

Barostan scarcely heeded what the other man said, he was so engrossed in the new train of thought which Elizabeth's note had awakened. Though her words were so simple, so matter of fact, being indeed a direct appeal, as it were, to his protection, he seemed to read beneath the surface—he seemed to feel that these words were laden with a deeper significance. It was useless for prudence or even pride to raise up any barrier. This call from her found him only too eager to respond. Indeed, he actually began to count the hours that must elapse before he could arrange his departure.

James Malcolm found himself studying this man intently, and each moment seemed to bring home to him the fact that Lord Ottershaw required an almost impossible task performed.

"How can I bend such a man to my will?" mused Malcolm to himself; "it can only be done by some trick," and the mere thought of acting treacherously to one who, although a stranger, had shown him such kindness, was hateful to him. At this very turn an outside influence reached him to strengthen him. As though the man who had employed him had grasped generally what would pass through his mind, there was brought to him at this moment a cabled message from the shipping office which had his address.

It was merely an announcement, and was not even signed.

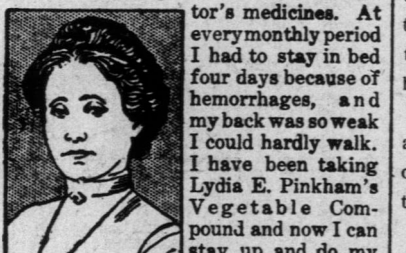
"Have this day dispatched to your mother the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds; the remainder will be sent on your return."

For an instant the pale face became suffused with color.

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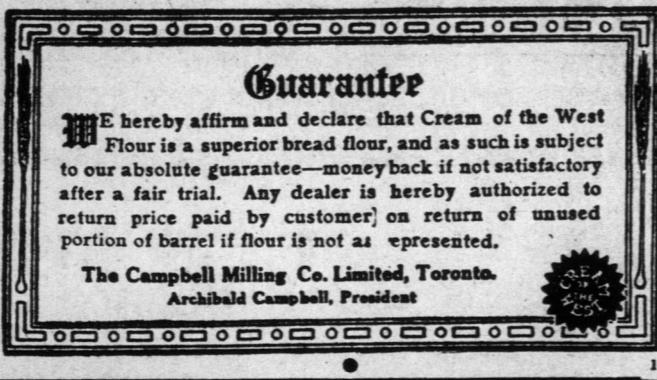
"I am now in great deal better health than I ever expected to be, so I think I ought to thank you for it."—Mrs. O. M. CLINE, S. Main St., Brownsville, Ind.

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Barostan looked at him rather anxiously.

"Have you bad news, Mr. Malcolm?" he asked.

Malcolm caught his breath and paused before replying.

"Not exactly bad," he answered, with difficulty, "but this cable will change my plans. I shall have to return to England at once."

"Why, then," exclaimed Barostan, heartily, "we will travel together. I beg that you will allow me to arrange your departure with mine, and you ought to rest now, I am sure. You look none too well. Do not study ceremony with me, Mr. Malcolm; study yourself entirely. If you would like to go to your room, everything is prepared for you."

Alone in that spacious room, James Malcolm walked about restlessly.

The news that half the money had reached his mother put a kind of cord about him. Now, if he had wished to do so, he would not draw back. It was a clever piece of work on Ottershaw's part.

"For should I fail him," said Malcolm to himself, unsteadily, "then he will demand repayment of that money, and the truth will have to be told to my mother. Why do I doubt him, I wonder? If I had thought there was anything black in this business though I had fallen so low, I would not have touched it. He calls himself this man's friend, and Barostan is a man whose friendship any man would care to have. Why would not Mark let me mention his name? There is something crooked in this—something that makes it very hard for me to move a step, and yet I must do something. . . . My wits have to provide some means to prevent David Barostan from reaching England."

He trembled and looked about him uneasily.

On a small table near was spread some food drinks, with liquors, and a decanter which he felt contained brandy.

Since he had left England not even the taste of stimulants had passed his lips.

It was a moment of horrible temptation to the man now to feel that there, close at his hand, was something that would put courage into him; but he resisted the temptation.

It was the memory of his mother, and the conviction that Ottershaw could be merciless that kept him from this temptation.

"It's no use; I have to earn this money," he said to himself, doggedly, "and, after all, why should I set myself up to be greater or better than Ottershaw? After all, let me remember that he has given me my chance—a chance I never thought would give such joy to my old mother. Let me cease playing the fool, now that the work is beginning in real earnest!"

CHAPTER XVII.

Elizabeth's Discovery.

Mrs. Griffin arched her brows many times in the days that followed, when, on two occasions, she found herself confronted by Lord Ottershaw when she went to see Elizabeth.

She did not question, but Beth felt it incumbent upon her to explain a life.

"He asked me for my friendship, Ellen; he put it in a way that I could not refuse. And," she added, bravely, "I am glad to be friends, glad if I can be of the smallest help to him, as he says I can be."

Mrs. Griffin caught her breath with an impatient sigh.

"Sometimes," she said to herself, "I would give anything to see Beth show a little of Lil's disposition. Shall I ever knock any worldliness into her, I wonder?"

On one occasion her prudence gave way.

"Does Lil approve of—of Mark's visits here?" she asked.

Elizabeth looked at her kinswoman almost coldly.

"I wish you would not say such things, Ellen," she answered, and there was annoyance in her voice. "We have made a compact, he and I," she said, a moment later, and she spoke softly, "there will be no more foolishness. Don't you realize, Ellen, that he cares for Henry?"

"My dear," Mrs. Griffin said, "I have known Mark ever since he was a boy. I have let him ride roughshod over me, and I have adored him. He was the prettiest boy imaginable! But I have never deceived myself about him, Beth. Mark cares for only one person in this world, and that is the Earl of Ottershaw."

"I think sometimes you are very unjust," Elizabeth said, quietly. "I know that he has been spoiled, but I'm sure that there is good in him."

"Believe it, my dear," said Mrs. Griffin, gravely; "a strong faith is a splendid thing for anyone to have."

To herself she was saying, "Shall I open her eyes, or shall I wait a little longer? Something is working in Mark's mind; I have not got the clew to it yet. Naturally, this pretended friendship is a fraud. What would she say, I wonder, if I were to tell her that when he is not here, he is dangling about the Garland's house? He has got his grip on Lil, and is playing fast and loose with that contemptible little butterfly. I wish

(To be continued.)

Barostan would come home!" Mrs. Griffin confessed once to herself. "I never thought the day would come when I should desire such a thing, but little by little it has been forced upon me that Elizabeth needs a man's protection. I am all very well, but Mark can be too subtle even for me. She never speaks of Barostan, yet somehow I cannot help feeling that she has something more than mere respect for him."

And all this time Elizabeth was guarding a secret in her heart.

Many a time in the days that followed after that letter had gone she had tortured herself with feelings of proud regret, mingled with uneasiness.

"He will not come," she had said to herself. "I have only humiliated myself by asking him." And with her heart set at rest about Ottershaw, that pressing need of protection that had urged her to write passed from her a little.

And more than once she said to herself, "How I wish I could get my letter back again!" Yet she did not say this very convincing; it was only that nervous pride had prompted the thought.

That very day, as she and Mrs. Griffin sat at luncheon, she was saying this to herself more than once and suddenly, as the recollection came to her that Barostan had not written once to her directly, she flushed hotly, and then she grew very pale.

"Of course he will not come," she said to herself; "most probably he will not even believe in my letter. Why should he? Oh, why did I write in such a hurry?"

Mrs. Griffin noticed that Elizabeth was silent, and seemed to have some new trouble on her mind, but she left the girl unquestioned. "If I am to know, she will tell me," she said to herself; "if not, questioning on my part would only worry her."

After lunch she went to pay a visit to Mary, who was not well, and was obliged to keep to her room; and as she sat alone there was brought to Elizabeth a telegraphic message.

She opened it listlessly enough, and then it was as though every vein in her body was on fire, for the message was signed "David Barostan," and it said:

"Thank you for your letter. I sail for England at once."

Elizabeth got up and stood by the fire.

"What is the matter with me?" she asked herself, almost nervously, for that same burning sensation did not leave her, and looking down, she found that she was clasping that bit of paper close to her heart as though it were some precious living thing.

Then the truth came to her.

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(To be continued.)

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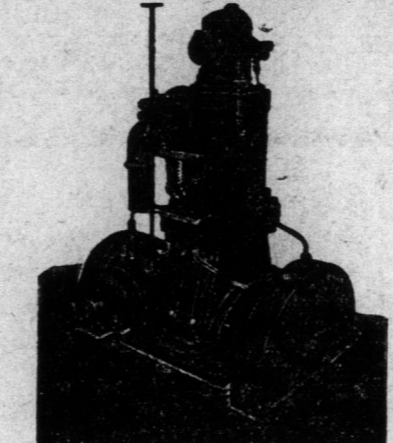
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