

A Terrible Tangle.

CHAPTER XIX.

The feeling of those two strong hands at his throat had finished the work that the brandy had commenced. The sense of wrong, and the shame of wrong was flung to the winds. In these, the first days of returning to the influence of drink, the man's brain was full of strange thoughts, and now he hated Barostan. His distorted mind saw in Barostan the instrument that was to destroy him if he did not himself destroy.

By tipping the sailors, Barostan had obtained a sort of freedom on board. When all the others were fast asleep, he had been wont to slip on deck and watch the ship glide like a phantom through the waters. Now Barostan slid back the door at the head of the companion stairs and passed out. He had quickly calmed his anger.

"Poor wretch!" he said to himself, "if he could only realize what he has said he would cut out his tongue. And yet how strangely he spoke. It seems almost as if he were resolved to rouse me. Well," he shrugged his shoulders, "in a few days I hope we shall part. I doubt if he will let anyone do anything for him; but still, I must try to help him in some way."

By this time Barostan had approached the strong iron railing that ran round the ship. The dawn was cold and gray.

They had passed now into smooth waters, and there was something in the atmosphere that spoke of a storm and strife quelled.

There was a decided fog prevailing that threatened to grow deeper. Well wrapped up as he was, David Barostan shivered. It seemed to him as if he had said farewell to sunshine when he had left La Platte.

A strange depression fell upon him. For the first time he regretted that he had taken this voyage.

The fog increased. He could hear the voices of the sailors calling to one another. They seemed a long way off.

Gradually everything was wrapped in impenetrable whiteness. He could barely see the rail against which he was leaning.

The shrill whistle that rang out from the engine room enhanced the mystery.

"I had better turn in," Barostan said to himself, and he stepped forward. As he did so, he touched another man. It was Malcolm! They could barely see into one another's eyes.

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yet something wild, something extraordinarily fierce about Malcolm, communicated itself to Barostan.

"Let me pass," he said, a little harshly. "What are you doing here? Why do you grip my hand like that?" Malcolm laughed.

"I want you," he said. "I want you to be a witness. Just now you had your hand at my throat; you might have crushed the life out of me. Well, I mean to end my life, and you are going to see me do it!"

With that he slipped past Barostan, and the latter in an instant imagined that he understood the situation.

"Good God!" he said to himself, "he is going to throw himself overboard! The drink has made him mad!"

Barostan turned instantly and groped his way through the fog.

"Malcolm!" he called. "Malcolm!" "Here!" said the other voice, mocking, see where I sitting! Look when the ship dips I can almost touch the water. It is glorious, this! It is freedom—freedom! Ah!"

The word rang out like a cry, as if he had suddenly lost his hold.

Without pausing, Barostan flung off his coat and clambered onto the rail.

"Where are you—where are you, man? Give me your hands!"

"Here!" Malcolm's voice seemed fainter. "Here, just beside you Help! help! I am falling!"

Cautiously, Barostan clambered over the rail and stepped in the direction where he imagined the other man was calling. As he did so his hands were suddenly removed by force from the rail to which he clung, and he was launched into space.

A cruel, mocking laugh rang in his ears. Wildly, aimlessly, Barostan caught at the air, a cry gurgled in his throat, but there was nothing to which his hands could cling.

The next moment he had struck the sea. There was the sound of a faint splash, and then the waters had closed over him!

CHAPTER XX.

OTTERSHAW'S ANNOUNCEMENT.

Mr. Gooch was a little anxious about Elizabeth in the days that followed on that evening when he had called to tell her that David Barostan had started for England. He saw her frequently—more frequently, indeed, than formerly. She was constantly coming to him for advice; for, although the purchase of Glen Farm was now settled, there was still a number of things on hand.

The memorial to Basil Barostan was one of these. Elizabeth had arranged to postpone the performance of the dead man's music till his brother should arrive.

Mr. Gooch could not quite make up his mind whether Elizabeth was glad that her husband was coming or not.

He discussed the matter with his wife, with whom Elizabeth had made great friends, but Mrs. Gooch had no doubt on the subject whatever.

"Of course she is glad," she said. "I have watched her face many a time when we were speaking of him; she gets quite another expression. And, after all, why should she not be glad?" Inquired Mrs. Gooch, a minute later; "he is her husband, is he not? It would only be natural that she would be glad to see him back again. Don't you remember, when you went to America, how glad I was when you returned?"

"Yes," said Mr. Gooch, with a faint smile, "but our marriage was conventional, in a sense. I have never understood this marriage."

"Well, I don't think there is any very great mystery about it," observed his wife. "One thing is very sure,

Mr. Barostan has married a lovely wife—lovely in character as well as face. I have lost my heart to her, Dick. She is so simple, so unaffected—a great difference from her sister. You know I met Lady Garland the last time I went to have tea with Mrs. Barostan. She did not condescend to say two words to me, and I don't call her so very pretty, either. She was too much dressed, too much like a doll."

It certainly gratified David Barostan's old friends very much to realize that his wife, who was rapidly becoming a personage in society, should seek them out so constantly, but the lawyer could not satisfy himself about Elizabeth.

It seemed to him that her whole bearing had changed of late.

She never spoke of David Barostan voluntarily; only once she asked Mr. Gooch a question.

"When is this boat due?" And this question which Mr. Gooch could not possibly answer. Had Barostan sailed by one of the boats of the better line, it would have been easy to predict the date of his return, but in this small trading vessel, and especially at this time of the year, the voyage was almost sure to be a tardy one.

"What I cannot understand," said the lawyer, when this subject was broached, "is why your husband took passage in such a vessel. He would have done far better to have waited and gone by one of the faster ones. But perhaps he thought by starting earlier he would arrive earlier."

Elizabeth said nothing, only her heart leaped.

She knew why he had chosen this boat, and her heart thrilled as she realized his eagerness to answer her summons, his eagerness to be with her.

She hardly knew herself how intensely she longed for the moment when Mr. Gooch would send her a telegram, as he had promised to do, the very moment the Clytie was sighted.

Since she had come so friendly with Mrs. Gooch she had learned so much about him. All the good that she had gradually discovered was hidden in his boyhood, of his wonderful devotion to his beautiful mother, of his loyal duty to his father. The story of his brotherhood was known to her too surely to need any other words to embrace it. And little by little she shaped in her heart an altar of respect, of gratitude and of admiration for this man.

Something more there was than this; but Elizabeth hesitated to declare it even to herself.

"It is all so strange," she sometimes said to herself. "When I look back over the last six months, it seems to me as if all my life had been crammed into them. Is it possible," she asked herself on another occasion, "that I can be sitting here, longing for David Barostan—longing for the man who was to me so short a time ago everything that was odious?"

When she thought of Ottershaw, it was like probing a wound. Yet the words that she had spoken to him that bygone day at the White Farm embodied the truth. He himself had swept the evil from her eyes; he himself had shown her that he was not worthy of the love she could have given him; and it was the remembrance of his disloyalty that hurt her most.

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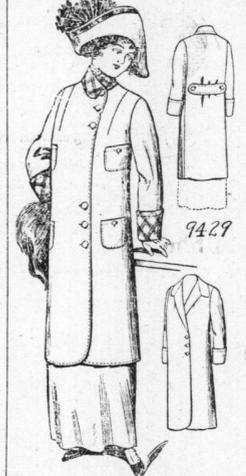
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