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A Terrible Tangle.

CHAPTER XVI.

David's struggle With Conscience.

Elizabeth had taken too strong a hold upon him to let the old anger burn for any length of time. Where Lil was concerned, he had nothing but bitterest scorn, a cotempt that rendered hate impossible; but even if he had tried to harden his heart against Elizabeth, the constant news that he received of her would have rendered this impossible, and yet the more he realized how thoroughly good she was, for the more it came to him that this woman was one who would be faithful and loyal even unto death, the further away she seemed from him.

Honor, duty, loyalty were no empty words with him, but there were moments when he told himself that he would gladly end his life if he could have seen written in Elizabeth's eyes that clamoring, yearning love that he had read in their expression the night she had imagined he was about to harm Ottershaw. And the more he reflected upon her character, the more he tortured himself.

"Such a woman as she does not change lightly," he said to himself: "for good or ill, that man will reign in her heart. She will do her best to forget him; if I were to go back she would fling herself heart and soul into all that would make life pleasant for me, she would even try to shut him out of her thoughts, but she would not succeed. And I stood between her and this love so cruelly, I have so deliberately spoiled her life! I wonder that she can have even a kind thought for me.'

The days passed, and Barostan made no plans. Sometimes he would say to himself:

"I will end this, I will go around the world, I will forget her.'

And yet, when the time came to move, he found that he had not the strength to do it, and in such a moment the truth was revealed to him—that why he lingered was because he felt vaguely that at some time or another Elizabeth might stretch out her hand to him. And he wanted to be there to answer if ever she should do this.

And then one day, suddenly, an unexpected pleasure came to him.

Entering his house, after one of his sojournings in the poorer quarters, this time in the shipping quarter, he was informed that a gentleman wished to see him—an Englishman.

The name, "James Malcolm," scribbled on a card, gave Barostan no clew to the identity of his guest, but he hastened to greet this stranger in hospitable fashion.

He saw before him a delicate-looking man, whose physical weakness was apparent, despite the fact that he wore the look of one who had just landed from a voyage.

On his side, Malcolm was instantly attracted by the man who stood before him.

He had a strange sense of constraint upon him as he began to play the part in which Ottershaw had coached him.

"I am a stranger to you, even by name, Mr. Barostan," he said, "but I have been bidden to approach you by your—your friends in England. I have come out here to see if I can pull up my strength. I was very ill when I left England. The voyage has done me heaps of good, but my present condition is not much to boast of."

"I am glad to see you," said Barostan, in his straightforward way, and he gripped the other man's hand warmly. You must put up with me for a little while. Where are you staying?"

"I only landed this morning at La Plata," Malcolm answered, in a low voice. The more he looked at this man before him, the more difficult because the task which Ottershaw had given him to execute.

"You are much too good," he added, hurriedly, and he colored hotly, for he had the instincts of a gentleman in him, and somehow at this moment—why, he could not tell exactly—he felt convinced that it was no friendly feeling that had prompted Lord Ottershaw to engage him to undertake this strange duty.

"I—I scarcely think I ought to encroach on your hospitality," he went on. "Remember, I am a stranger."

"You say you came from friends," David Barostan answered him.

James Malcom put his hands in his pockets, and drew out a notecase; it contained a slip of paper in an envelope which Ottershaw had given him and he handed it to Barostan.

As Malcolm saw how the blood rushed to Barostan's face as he hurriedly read the few words that were written on a scrap of paper within, his sense of constraint that was a kind of shame deepened. The letter Barostan read purported to have come from Elizabeth, and it ran:

"Will you be good to this poor man, who is in bad health. I am interested in him."

It was signed with her name.

For a beginner, Ottershaw had succeeded very admirably in imitating the writing of another person.

At any rate, the forgery was no forgery to David Barostan. His hands trembled as he folded that little paper and slipped it into his pocket.

"You bring me a message from my wife, Mr. Malcolm," he said, and despite himself his voice trembled. "That is the best introduction in the world. Let us settle it at once; let me know where your traps are, and my servant shall bring them here."

In a strained way, Malcolm gave the desired information, and while he stood alone, while Barostan went to interview his servant, James Malcolm passed one hand over his brow.

On the voyage he had lost for a time that sense of anxiety which quite unconsciously had overshadowed his satisfaction at passing, for a time at least, as a respectable member of humanity, and capable of earning so much money.

The sense of freedom, the feeling of self-respect that restored health had brought to him during the long voyage, the reawakened desires to find the best in life once more, had carried him along as in a sort of dream; and now he paused.

"Five hundred pounds is a large sum," he said, slowly, to himself. "It would carry such joy to the old home. But it seems to me now that Ottershaw is paying a very large sum for very little work. If he really is this man's friends, why should he pay anyone?"

But he quickly banished these thoughts.

"Well, this is not my business," he said to himself almost harshly. "I am pledged to do what Ottershaw wants, and it is not my province to question."

It gave David Barostan an extraordinary amount of pleasure to receive his unexpected guest.

The fact that he came with a word from Elizabeth enhanceed the pleasure.

He made all sorts of plans to interest and amuse this stranger within his gates. Malcolm's arrival changed the whole outlook for him.

He had absolutely forgotten that it was mail day from England, and was smoking and chatting with Malcolm when his servant brought him some letters.

There was the usual large envelope addressed in Richard Gooch's handwriting, and beneath this, slipped between some envelopes bearing the local postmark, there was a letter which sent the blood coursing wildly about his heart as he saw it.

"Will you excuse me?" he said to Malcolm, and, passing into his own room, he sat down to open Elizabeth's letter.

"It will be something about this young fellow," he said to himself; "doubtless to give me some information about him." But as he read what she had written he thrilled from head to foot.

The words, "I have great need of you," seemed to him like the fulfillment of some dream, for this was what he had waited for. In an instant his decision was taken; no matter hat it might cost him to go back to England, he would not hesitae in going.

Richard Gooch's letter gave him further information of Elizabeth's doings.

She had practically arranged the repurchea of Glen Farm, and she was discussing with Mr. Gooch a suggestion of devoting a certain portiian of her money to a charitable institution in memory of the boy who had died.

"She wishes," said Richard Gooch, "this memorial to take the form of benefiting poor children. There is no doubt, my dear Barostan, that your wife has very little real pleasure in society. She does what she is doing because she thinks that it gives you pleasure. To live at the White Farm, or a life lived in constant ministration to others, is her ideal existence." Then the lawyer added, "I have received your will, and have placed it among your papers. I have not informed Mrs. Barostan that you have made this will, but do so if you wish her to know."

When David Barostan rejoined his guest there was a light in his face that made him ten years younger.

(To be continued.)

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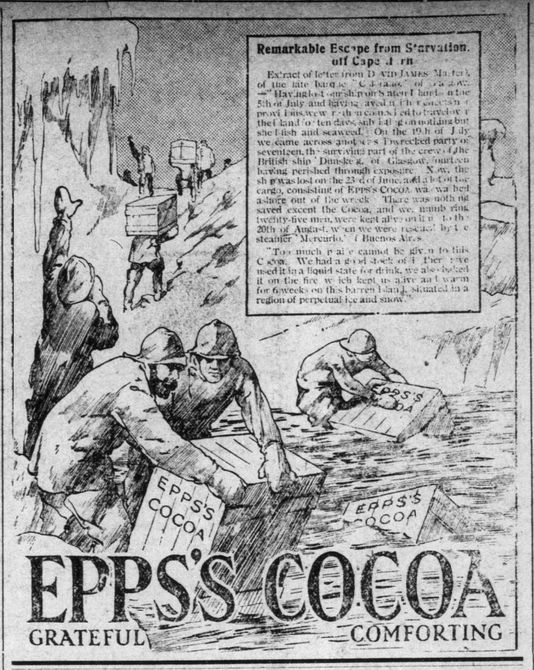

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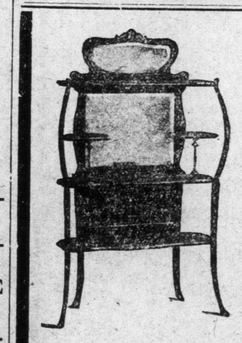

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