

A Terrible Tangle.

CHAPTER IX.

BAROSTAN'S PROPOSITION.

A hot, burning sensation went from Ottershaw's heart as he heard that Barostan had confided his wife to the housekeeper's care.

"He had asked me to look after her, and I am going to stay the night with her, my lord," said the housekeeper. "I have put them in those ground floor rooms in the tower. I would have given them better rooms but he would not have them. He was so masterful. Are you sure I cannot do anything for you, my lord?"

Lord Ottershaw dismissed Mrs. Winter with a kind word.

The mystery of this marriage grew deeper and deeper.

It was impossible for him to try and account for the strange events. Elizabeth's letter threw no light on the matter. The story that Mrs. Winter had given him of Barostan's roughness and then of his change of manner did not impress Lord Ottershaw with any other feeling save that this man to whom Elizabeth had given herself was a man of violent moods.

"But if he thinks to stand between her and me," mused Ottershaw, grimly, "he has to learn a lesson. Elizabeth may be his wife, she may even desire to have no words with me, but she has played a part in my life that will never be effaced, and before I let her go absolutely, I must hear from her own lips why she has done this thing."

When his man came to help him to his room, Ottershaw dismissed him.

"I shall not go yet," he said; "I have some letters to write. I can manage for myself—go to bed."

He sat quietly, pretending to read, but unconscious only of anger and of misery which was utterly new to him.

His love for Elizabeth had been based upon everything that was pure and good. It had awakened in him an utterly new spirit, changed the outlook of life in him, arousing him for the first time to the responsibility of his position. Making of him, indeed, that serious man whom Ellen Griffin had so long looked for and had almost begun to despair of finding in him, and this sudden discovery threatened to act just as swiftly

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many lands, this creature that is almost beautiful compared with me. For this man's sake she would make the greatest sacrifice that any woman could make, and he lies there, at my feet."

A sudden fierce joy took possession of him.

"I could life him up so easily," was the meaning of that joy. "and with one jerk I could throw him into that torrent. At least, if he did not lie, he would be maimed and made hideous in her eyes."

He almost stretched out his hands to grasp Ottershaw, and then he drew back.

"And would that make any difference?" he asked himself, with dull passion. "If he were bruised, and maimed, and disfigured, would she turn from him? Would she not love him, perhaps, even more passionately than she does now?"

He stood breathing heavily. He was fighting a fight with himself.

"Why should I study her? Why should I spare him?" he asked himself at one instant; the next: "What should I gain by using force? Even if he were dead, he would always be stronger than I. She loves him!"

With a moan he covered his face with his hands. Like Ottershaw, the wildness of this spot had drawn him magnetically.

He had been unable to rest in the house; he had been walking for hours, and the wild rushing of the waters, the sense almost of living passion in this corner of nature, had drawn him back to it.

Seeing that Ottershaw did not move, but lay inert and curiously still, Barostan aroused himself.

It gave him a passing thrill of conscious pride to feel that he was so strong, that he could lift this fallen man so easily.

Firstly, assuring himself that the quietness was merely unconsciousness, he took Ottershaw from the ground, and just as he was leaving the bridge, treading cautiously—for the wood was wet—he recoiled; some one spoke to him.

It was Elizabeth.

With her hair loosened on her shoulders, and her dark cloak wrapped tightly about her, she looked like some beautiful spirit of the night.

Her face was deathly white, her lips stiff with fear.

While she had been sitting at the window, lost in those sad and miserable thoughts, she had seen Ottershaw pass so painfully and slowly across the lawn.

The bridge to which he had tended his way was visible also, and only the sound of the rushing waters had broken the heavy stillness of the night.

If it had been possible for Elizabeth to feel deeper emotion, keenest pain, such feelings came to her as she sat there, so near and yet so far from the man she loved.

She had risen and passed out of the long window, watching him as a mother might watch a child.

She thought she knew what was driving him from the house.

"It is because I am here," she said, and once again she shivered with humiliation and anguish.

And when he had stood so long on the bridge, her heart had grown a little calmer.

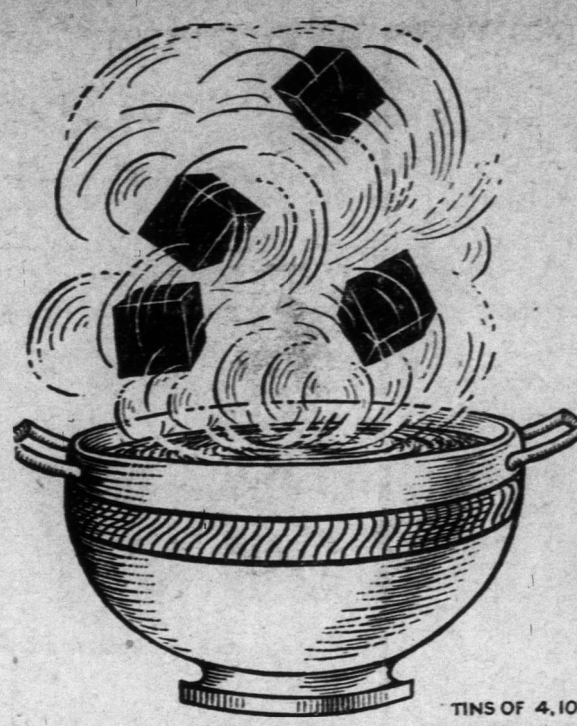
"He will forget soon," she said to herself. "Perhaps, after all, this has only been a fancy with him. Ellen has spoken so much about him and his flirtations. Why should I suppose that this which passed between us was stronger and deeper with him than any other has been? Yes, he will forget," she repeated, but each time she said it she staved herself, as it were.

At times she feared that he would turn his head and see her, and she hid behind a pillar lest he should do this; but Lord Ottershaw had never turned, never looked at the house. He had only stood gazing at the water.

Then all at once Elizabeth's heart had leaped into her throat. She caught sight of that other tall, dark figure, and she had seen how violently Ottershaw had started.

Clinching her hands and trembling she watched him turn and make that advance toward Barostan, and then she saw him throw out his hands and stumble and fall.

For a few moments Elizabeth said nothing; then, acting on a wild im-



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pulse, as though comprehending all that was passing through Barostan's mind, she wrapped her cloak tightly about her, and moved rapidly across the lawn to the bridge.

"You are not going to make her travel again to-day, are you?" she asked.

"Yes," said David Barostan, in his abrupt way. "It is impossible for us to remain here. I made a mistake in coming. The best thing I can do is to go as quickly as I can."

"But his lordship," began Mrs. Winter, quite flustered.

Barostan smiled.

"Lord Ottershaw will make no objection. And, by the way," he added, a little artfully, "I think perhaps you ought to go and attend to him. I saw him walking in the grounds last night."

"Walking!" exclaimed Mrs. Winter. "Oh, dear me! and now I shall have him as bad as ever he was. Well, I'll send a maid to attend to your wife, Mr. Barostan, for I'd best go and see after his lordship."

Barostan watched her go, and then he passed into the little sitting room. The door of the other room was ajar. From where he stood he could just catch a glimpse of Elizabeth sleeping.

The wildness of her expression had gone. It was like the face of a child lying on the pillows, with her beautiful brown hair tossed in picturesque disorder about her.

"And she is mine; she belongs to me!" he said to himself. But there was no exultation in the thought now. He turned away, and was sitting



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writing, when the maid Mrs. Winter sent tapped at the door.

The letter he wrote was to Ottershaw, a mere formal renouncement of his position.

"Do not arouse my wife," he said to the maid; "but if she wakes ask her to dress as quickly as she can."

A second maid came in to bring a dainty breakfast, and Barostan went out and strolled to and fro on the pavement beyond, waiting.

It was not very long before Elizabeth emerged from the bedroom.

She looked shockingly ill, but she was mistress of herself.

As the maid withdrew, Barostan came in through the long window, and he noticed how painfully she flushed at his approach.

He adopted a matter-of-fact tone.

"I am sorry to hurry you, but there is a train I want to catch from the nearest station in an hour and a half.

It is a good three-quarters of an hour's drive, they tell me. You must eat a good breakfast."

She sat down, and he sat down also.

It was like a dream to him watch her small hands, that though they were so dainty, were still so capable, pour the milk and coffee into the cups. How often in his imagination had he let some such vision as this form itself before the maid's eye, to tempt, to make his heart beat, and then to make his real life about him more dreary and hopeless.

To be continued.

Striped ribbon is claiming attention for jaunty street hats.

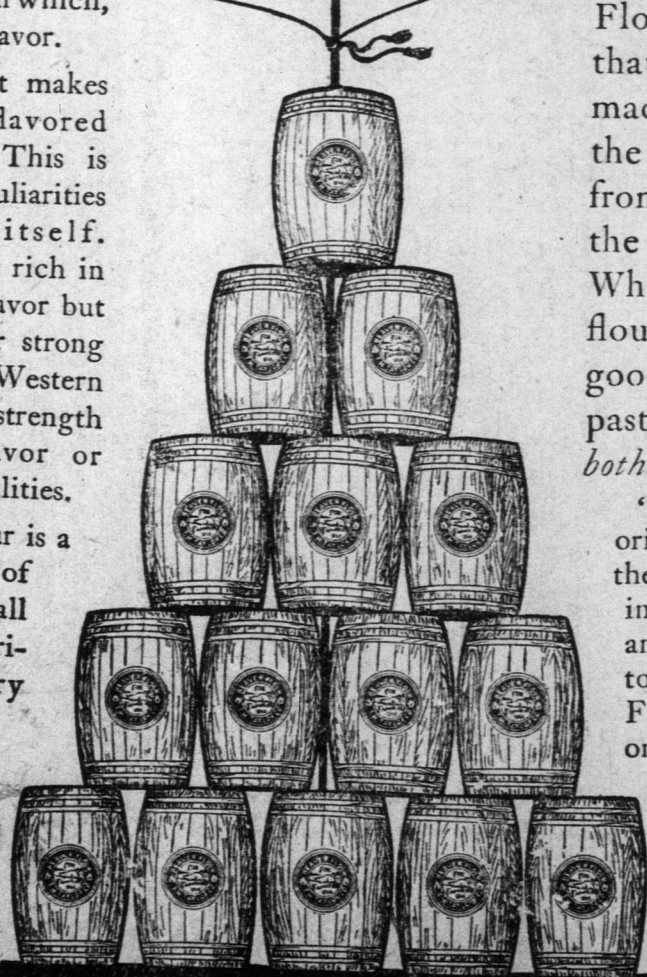
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