

A Terrible Tangle.

CHAPTER XXIII.

In the Darkness.

"I cannot do it yet," she whispered to herself, as she paced through the rooms, all warm and cozy, and remembered how dear he had been to these old servants.

Mary had travelled with her, and she had also brought back the girl Mabel White.

It had been a sudden impulse that had made Elizabeth send for this girl. She longed to hear Barostan's name spoken, she longed to listen to that tale of his bravery and kindness. It was, in a sense, a consolation to her to feel that she could speak with one who had the right to regard him with gratitude, but this little pleasure had been denied Elizabeth, for the girl, exhausted by her long day of travelling, had been so ill that Mary had put her to bed.

And, indeed, Elizabeth had been in no condition to speak with a stranger after Ottershaw had left her. She hesitated the next morning to subject the girl to another long day of travelling, but the moment that Mabel White had heard—through Mary—that Mrs. Barostan was going back to the White Farm, she had pleaded almost piteously to go back too.

"It is so peaceful there, so quiet; London frightens me so."

So, rather against her judgment, Mary gave way, and they travelled with Elizabeth up to the North, back to that little house where David Barostan's father and mother lived, and which had grown to be the dearest of Elizabeth's possessions. The anguish she felt was increased a hundredfold by contact with these things that reminded her of him, and for a time even Ottershaw and what lay in the immediate future drifted away from her mind as he found herself in the embrace of this little home.

Moreover, there was work for her to do. For late that night Mary came to her to tell her that Mabel White was very ill—so ill that a doctor was necessary.

And in the cold night hours, Elizabeth herself went to the stables, and, harnessing the old pony, drove a couple of miles away to fetch a doctor.

This girl was almost dear to her, in that she had been confided to her care by David Barostan. And, apart from this, the fragile creature, pret-

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ty and so friendless, made her way directly to Beth's heart, so that she grieved when the doctor, who drove back with her, gave his verdict that this frail young life was not destined to last much longer.

Against all Mary's entreaties, Elizabeth would nurse the girl herself. It was a labor of love to her, and in such work the days slipped by, and something of healing fell upon her aching heart. She sketched out her future as she sat in that quiet sick room.

"For Henry's sake, I must marry this man; but I will not take with me one thing that belonged to David. Everything that I have shall be given to charity—given in his name—given as a memorial to him; and perhaps when Mark finds that I am poor it may make a difference."

Yet she knew, alas! that this would make no difference; and she trembled as she counted the days, and saw that the time was growing shorter.

Since that night before she quitted London, Ottershaw had left her undisturbed; not even a letter nor a telegram reached her. Elizabeth did not receive herself. She knew that this did not signify freedom—that it signified, indeed, quite the reverse; and her spirit sank as the time went so swiftly and the end of the month was a sight. And then, one day, Ellen Griffin arrived unexpectedly.

"I have been long in coming," she said, as she held Elizabeth in her arms, but I have been very busy. Let me look at you, Beth. You—you are doing too much," Mrs. Griffin added, hurriedly. "Mary tells me that you are night and day with this sick girl. You will kill yourself, Beth, my dear one!"

Beth laid in her cousin's arms and looked up at the rugged face.

"And do you think that death has errors for me Oh, Ellen, Ellen! he added, with a burst of passion. 'the world envies me. I have so much of what the world calls good, and yet I am so tired, so miserable. I have no wish to live.'"

"I have a great deal to say to you," remarked Mrs. Griffin, in her sweet and practical way. "You must hand your sick nursing over to Mary for a night, at least. This is only a flying visit, Beth. I am going back to London to-morrow."

Beth looked at her kinswoman, and her heart began to beat quickly.

"Ellen, you have something to tell me," she said.

"I have something for you to do," was Mrs. Griffin's reply; then she waited till they were alone in her bedroom, but, once there, she put a question to Beth.

"Has Mark been to see you?" was that question.

Elizabeth turned a shade paler and shook her head.

"He is leaving you absolutely alone?"

Elizabeth bent her head in assent.

"He is very sure of you," said Mrs. Griffin, a little dryly; then Elizabeth's face flamed into red color.

"I have given him my word, Ellen; I have pledged myself to marry him."

"Why?" asked Ellen Griffin, in her direct fashion. "But you need not answer me," she said, the next moment; "I know why. Because Mark is cur enough to tell you that he will drag Lil in the dirt if you do not become his wife; because Lil is a paltry worthless creature, and because Henry Garland is a dying man. But are these things strong enough to make you do that which you know to be a kind of death to yourself? Should any woman sacrifice herself so wantonly? However," added Mrs. Griffin, as she threw her outdoor wraps on the bed, "I am here to tell you what

you have to do. Send a telegram for Mark—he is not far from here; as a matter of fact, though you have been in ignorance of the fact, he is staying within an hour's journey of this place I can give you his address."

"Why should I send for him?" asked Elizabeth, with white lips.

"Because I command you to do so," said Mrs. Griffin, sternly.

Then she whipped round and took Beth by the shoulders.

"Look me in the face," she said sternly, "and answer me—which of these men did you really love? The man you married, or the man you are about to marry?"

Elizabeth's face worked; she could say nothing for a moment; then a cry broke from her lips.

"Oh! Ellen, you know, you know!" she said "I have hidden nothing from you. It was David I loved! David that I shall always love! I told you once before that for a short while I thought Mark was something greater than any other human being, a creature too good almost for ordinary life, but he has torn those feelings up by the roots. He has made me despise him, he has made me hate him. Though I am going to be his wife, I shall despise him and hate him as long as I live."

Mrs. Griffin loosened her hold on the girl's shoulders.

"Write to this address," she said; "it is too late to send a telegram from here to-night, but a letter will reach him the first thing in the morning. Simply say that you want him."

Reluctantly enough, Elizabeth did as she was bid, and when the letter was sealed she said that she would walk and post it herself at the little village shop half a mile away, where letters were called for every day.

The run through the cold, crisp air acted as a tonic to her nerves, yet nothing could lift her heart—not even that vague sensation of hope which Ellen Griffin's visit and words had put into it.

"If I only could have my freedom!" Beth said to herself, as she turned to walk home again. "If I could only dedicate my love for him! It seems so awful that I should appear to forgive him! that within a month I should give myself to another man!"

Just before she reached the gates of the old farm Elizabeth had a fright. Something moved in the darkness of the road, and then all at once a man—a tramp—stood up and looked at her in a fixed, and, as she imagined, nervously, a menacing way. Though he was no coward, she was frightened and she broke into a run. Then, just as she reached the farm, she reproached herself.

"It must be some poor creature who has, perhaps, no place to sleep, no food to eat; one of those poor men whom I have seen working their way by road to Newcastle. I wish I had not run away." Indeed, she almost turned to retrace her steps, but at that moment the door opened, and as Mrs. Griffin called her by name rather anxiously, she was obliged to enter.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A Sinner Overwhelmed.

Ottershaw was lounging moodily in a room in the provincial hotel, where he had been staying since he had followed Elizabeth from town when that letter was brought to him.

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He could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw her writing; he looked at the letter incredulously for a time, and then he smiled.

"So she sends for me, after all!" he said to himself. "Women are all alike! But I need not grumble, for I was getting a bit weary of this; and if Beth is coming to her senses, life will be a little more cheerful, at all events!"

He dressed and ate his breakfast in the highest spirits, and he looked his handsomest as he ordered a vehicle to be got ready, and drove out to that little farm nestling on the hill side.

He became a little irritable, however, as he drew nearer to the place. He hated it.

"I'll take precious good care she never comes here any more," he said to himself. "There shall be no nonsense in the future; Beth has made me suffer far too much already. It maddens me to think that she went through even the pretense of calling herself that man's wife."

He was shown into the room where he had had that short but unpleasant interview with Elizabeth once before, and he frowned and bit his lip suddenly as he saw Ellen Griffin rise from a chair and greet him.

It stabbed his vanity sharply to realize that, after all, it was not Beth who had brought him here, and it roused all his bitterest feelings.

"What a delightful surprise," he said, as he advanced and put forward his hand.

Mrs. Griffin put hers behind her back.

"Mrs. Barostan will be here directly," she said; "won't you sit down?" She touched a bell as she spoke, and Elizabeth appeared at once. She merely bent her head in recognition of Lord Ottershaw's presence, but she said nothing.

(To be continued.)

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