

# "A GOLD LADEN DERELICT"

OR  
The Impecunious Adventuress.

CHAPTER VIII  
HIS FATE DECIDED.

"Davis, you can call for me at eleven. Meanwhile you can put the machine up and amuse yourself at the Lyric, or any other place of amusement that suits you; and here's something to pay your way. But don't go over the line, you know."

"Oh, no, Sir Arthur, of course not. Hope you don't think I'd do such a thing," said his chauffeur, as he took the half sovereign with one hand and touched the brim of his cockade hat with the forefinger of the other, in which he was holding the wheel loosely.

"Very well, then—don't forget, eleven sharp."

"No, Sir Arthur, I will be back on time—eleven sharp."

The uniformed porter, with a couple of medals on his breast, stiffened up and saluted as Eversley went in.

"Hello, Stevenson; is that you? So you have left the service?"

"Yes, sir," replied the man. "Invalidated out. That bullet in the elbow at Belmont, you may remember."

"Ah, yes, I remember, of course. Good job you saved your arm. Stiff now, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir—not much more good to me; but I've been fortunate in finding a fairly comfortable berth, and that's more than a lot of us did."

"Yes, yes," said Sir Arthur, as his recollection went back to that terrible day when this man and himself had ridden almost side by side through the leaden hall of the Boer fire whistling around their ears. "Well, I'm glad to see you all right again now, Stevenson."

He took a letter case out of the inside pocket of his dress coat, fumbled about with it for a few seconds, during which the ex-corporal of lancers watched him with somewhat anxious but keen eyes, and finally extracted a five-pound note. He gave it to Stevenson, and said, in a halting voice, which the old soldier recognized with an apprehension which he dared not express:

"There, that's for old acquaintance sake. I'm a richer man now, Stevenson, than I was when you and I went climbing kopjes. No, no; don't bother about thanks. Yes, I—yes, I want you to tell me—I mean—well, on which floor does Mrs. Ashley live?"

"Mrs. Ashley, sir? Oh, yes, the lady who is staying with her aunts, the Misses Holroyd. First floor. But, allow me, I will take you to the door. You see, sir, we have no elevator here; if you will kindly come with me up the stairs. Thank you, Sir; this way."

Sir Arthur followed him up the staircase, doing his best to pull himself together, so that he might face the ordeal, terrible in one sense, and yet possibly delightful in another, which he knew with his soldier instinct was in front of him. The crisis of his life was now within the distance of a few steps, and, as he went up the stairs, and the moments passed, he

wished with all the strength of his manhood that was left in him that he might meet his fate as the man he once had been.

They reached the landing on the first floor, and the porter rapped at a door on the right-hand side. Then he saluted again and said: "Thank you very much, sir," and went back down the stairs.

Sir Arthur stood outside the door, expecting to be admitted by the usual housemaid in black dress and white apron and cap, but when the door was opened he saw under the light of the red-shaded lamp hanging from the ceiling of the hall a vision of loveliness which seemed to him to have been materialized out of the semidarkness. He saw the gleam of eyes which looked almost black in the half light, the pale gleam of white shoulders and arms, an indescribable expression of welcome lighting up a perfect face, and he heard a sweet and sadly long-remembered voice saying:

"Well, Sir Arthur!"

He put his hand out, and another hand, small and soft and warm, met it and seemed to nestle in it. The black eyes were looking up into his, the perfectly curved lips were trembling with an unspoken but irresistible suggestion.

The next moment his arms were around her. Her daintily clad form was crushed up in an almost savage embrace. His lips were upon hers, and with just a little tremor, they answered his kiss, and so the fate which he had come to meet was decided.

CHAPTER IX  
SALVATION FIRST, MARRIAGE AFTERWARD.

"My dear Arthur, it is really quite impossible at present. Surely you must see that yourself."

"But why not, Lillias? Of course, I grant everything you say. I've had a pretty hard time of it, and I'm a very considerable bit of a wreck, but—will, if you look in that glass, you'll see one of the reasons—"

"You have no right to say that. When you were little more than a boy, and I was quite a girl, you fell in love with me, honestly; and what you've just been saying proves that it was more than what they call call love. I admit that I didn't think so then, and to be perfectly candid with you, I was not sufficiently in love with you to—"

"Oh, yes! I know what you're going to say—you weren't sufficiently in love with me to marry a Lieutenant of lancers, who couldn't live on his pay, and depended on his brother's charity to help him out; but, you see, all that is altered now."

"Yes, and other things are altered, too, Arthur," she replied. "We are no longer boy and girl, you and I. A good deal has happened since then, you know, and for one thing, I have been married."

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The champagne that he had had at dinner and a fairly stiff brandy and soda afterward, had invigorated his nerves sufficiently for the time being to enable him to see the suggestion instantly. He pulled himself up in the armchair in which he had been half sitting and half lying, and said, almost sharply:

"I didn't need to be reminded of that, Lillias. I didn't want to be. As regards the rest, of course, you are quite right; and I'm glad to hear you say that you see now that what you were kind enough to call my call love was something a good deal more serious—in fact, is still a good deal more serious than that. But I really cannot see that the fact that we have grown up from boy and girl to man and woman, and that you have incidentally been married widowed in the same time, should be a sufficient reason for your refusing to become Lady Eversley, with a rent roll of forty thousand a year, three places in the country, and a decent house in Cumberland Gate."

"Yes, yes," she replied, with a little show of impatience. "But surely you must know it would be no use trying to tempt me with that sort of life. After all our losses through these miserable Markham swindlers, we still have enough left to live upon, and you—"

"No, no, of course, I don't mean anything of that sort. Certainly I ought to know you better than that, and I do, but if you could only— No, I won't say that. Put it this way: I know very well that in what the society papers called my splendid inheritance, I am myself about the worst item—at least as I am at present. But, Lillias, there's something left of me even now, something that might be worth saving; and you're the only woman, the only human being on earth, in fact, who could save me. I'm not asking for your love. I'm asking for your mercy."

"It is very nice of you to put it in that way, Arthur," she said, very softly and sweetly, turning in her chair toward him and resting her chin on her hand. "But, don't you see, that this—well, this proposal of yours is altogether too splendid; and, besides, to be perfectly frank with you, I think that, just at present, you need a nurse more than you want a wife."

"And you don't like me well enough to be both? Well, then, I suppose that's about the end of it and of me; and so I may as well say good night and good-by!"

"No," she said quickly, almost impatiently; "you are quite wrong. Sit down, please, just for another minute or two, and let me explain. I do like you, Arthur. I like—yes, I'll confess it—I love you too well to do what you want, and there are other things, you know."

He nodded, and muttered: "Oh, yes, I understand."

"She went on, speaking more earnestly: "Yes, of course, you do; therefore, suppose we make a compromise."

"A compromise?" he echoed, sitting upright again, and looking sharply at her. "My dear Lillias, how on earth can there be a compromise in an affair like this? You know that I love you, and that I have loved you ever since those old days over at the Abbey, when I used to chase you around the garden for kisses. The point is, whether you like me well enough to marry me, or not. You can't compromise a question like that, you know; it must be one thing or the other."

"Oh, no," she replied; "that is another course which might be a quite possible one, and Arthur, I'm going to suggest this to you, to show you that I really do care for you—I mean, in a proper way, as a woman who honestly cares for a man."

"That's the best thing I have heard for many a long day, Lillias," he exclaimed. "Another way! Well, what is it? If you have thought of it, it must be something like a path to paradise."

"Don't be silly," she laughed, with a flash in her eyes and a flush on her cheeks, which, if possible, intoxicated his senses even more than they were. "It is a very plain and practical suggestion that I'm going to make."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, make it, Lillias, dear, and put me out of my misery one way or the other—by which, of course, I mean your way."

"Possibly," she replied, smiling, although her tone was somewhat grave. "You remember what Oliver Wendell Holmes said in one of his poems, 'Man has his will, but woman has her way,' and now, my way is this: You have asked me to do two things—to save you, as you put it, and to marry you. Now, if I were still just the same Lillias that you used to, as you've just said, hunt around the Abbey garden for kisses, I should probably take the attitude of the sentimental heroine of a cheap novel, and say, with a fine sense of innocent sacrifice: 'Arthur, I will marry you, and I will devote my life to saving you.'"

"Oh, look here, Lillias, don't pile it up quite so high as that. We are neither of us in a cheap novel, and the style doesn't quite suit you. You're a lot too good, and sensible, and sweet for that sort of thing, and, besides, I don't think that I've done anything to deserve being chaffed."

"I am not chaffing you, Arthur," she continued, more seriously than before. "On the contrary, I mean quite earnestly every word that I've said. I was widowed now. A woman who has been married, not very happily, perhaps, but still married, and, therefore, with a knowledge of the world that only marriage can give; and it is just because I have got that knowledge that I am not going to do as the young lady in the novel would."

"Then," he exclaimed, getting up out of his chair, and going across the little drawing-room to the side of her chair, "why have you been saying all this, Lillias, if you don't mean to marry me, after all? I asked you for mercy just now; this doesn't seem very like it, does it?"

She rose and faced him, her eyes shining into his, and her lips smiling in almost irresistible temptation. She put her hands on his shoulders and laughed so softly and sweetly that his shaken nerves shivered.

"I didn't say that I wouldn't marry you, Arthur; but you have said that I— I mean that you—well, yes, you do want saving, don't you? And I am the only one that can do it, as you believe. Now, will you believe in me enough to let me save you first, and marry you afterward?"

He took her by the arms and drew her toward him.

"Yes, Lillias, I should have no faith left in anything in heaven or on earth if I couldn't believe that," he answered fervently. "You are perfectly right. I'm pretty bad, I know, and, of course, if I'm not worth saving, I'm not worth marrying."

"You are worth both saving and marrying," she replied, as she felt his arms go around her, "and, quite between ourselves, I may tell you that I propose to do both."

(To be continued.)

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3138 is here depicted. It is cut in 4 Sizes: 8, 10 and 12 years. Size 10 will require 1 1/2 yard of 37 inch material for the gump and 3 1/2 yards for the dress. This model would look well in blue taffeta, with gump of balise or crepe. It is also nice for linen, chambray or voile. Brown plaid gulling could be selected for the dress and silk or crepe in a contrasting color for the gump.

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