

THE GOLDEN KEY

Or "The Adventures of Ledgard."

By the Author of "What He Cost Her."

CHAPTER XXXIV.—(Cont'd.)

"And his interest?" Francis asked. "Well, he is a large shareholder in the company," Trent said. "Of course he could upset us all if he liked. I should say that Da Souza would try all he could to keep him in the background until he had disposed of his shares."

"And how does your stock hold?" "I don't know," Trent said. "I only landed yesterday. I'm pretty certain though that there's no market for the whole of Da Souza's holding."

"He has a large interest, then?" "A very large one," Trent answered drily.

"I should like," Francis said, "to understand this matter properly. As a matter of fact I suppose that Monty is entitled to half the purchase money you received for the company."

Trent assented.

"It isn't that I grudge him that," he said, "although, with the other financial enterprises I have gone into, I don't know how I should raise half a million of money to pay him off. But don't you see my sale of the charter to the company is itself, Monty being alive, an illegal act. The title will be wrong, and the whole affair might drift into Chancery, just when a vigorous policy is required to make the venture a success. If Monty were here and in his right mind, I think we could come to terms, but when I saw him last, at any rate, he was quite incapable, and he might become a tool to anything. The Bears might get hold of him and ruin us all. In short, it's a beastly mess!"

Francis looked at him keenly.

"What do you expect me to do?" he asked.

"I have no right to expect anything," Trent said. "However, I saved your life and you may consider yourself therefore under some obligation to me. I will tell you then what I would have you do. In the first place, I know no more where he is than you do. He may be in England or he may not. I shall go to Da Souza, who probably knows. You can come with me if you like. I don't want to rob the man of a penny. He shall have all he is entitled to—only I do want to arrange terms with him quietly, and not have the thing talked about. It's as much for the others' sake as my own. The men who came into my syndicate trusted me, and I don't want them left."

Francis took a little silver case from his pocket, lit a cigarette, and smoked for a moment or two thoughtfully.

"It is possible," he said at last, "that you are an honest man. On the other hand you must admit that the balance of probability from my point of view is on the other side. Let us travel backwards a little way—to my first meeting with you. I witnessed the granting of this concession to you by the King of Bekwando. According to its wording you were virtually Monty's heir, and Monty was lying drunk in a climate where strong waters and death walk hand-in-hand. You leave him in the bush, proclaim his death, and take sole possession. I find him alive, do the best I can for him, and here the first act ends. Then what afterwards? I hear of you as an empire-maker and a millionaire. Nevertheless, Monty was alive and you knew he was alive, but when I reach Attra he has been spirited away. I want to know where! You say you don't know. It may be true, but it doesn't sound like it."

Trent's under-lip was twitching, a sure sign of the tempest within, but he kept himself under restraint and said never a word.

Francis continued, "Now I do not wish to be your enemy, Scarlett Trent, or do you an ill turn, but this is my word to you. Produce Monty within a week, and open reasonable negotiations for treating him fairly, and I will keep silent. But if you can't produce him at the end of that time I must go to his relations and lay all these things before them."

Trent rose slowly to his feet.

"Give me your address," he said, "I will do what I can."

Francis tore a leaf out from his pocketbook and wrote a few words upon it.

"That will find me at any time," he said. "One moment, Trent. When I saw you first you were with—a lady."

"Well!"

"I have been away from England so long," Francis continued slowly, "that my memory has suffered. Yet that lady's face was somewhat familiar. I ask her name?"

"Mrs. Ernestine Wendermott," Trent answered slowly.

Francis threw away his cigarette and lit another.

"Thank you," he said.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Da Souza's office was neither furnished nor located with the idea of impressing casual visitors. It was in a back-street off an alley, and although within a stone's throw of Leithbury its immediate surroundings were not exhilarating. A blank wall faced it, a greengrocer's shop shared with a wonderful, cellarlike public-house the honor of its more immediate neighborhood. Trent, whose first visit had looked about him with surprise mingled with some disgust.

He pushed open the swing door and found himself face to face with Da Souza's one clerk—a youth of unkempt appearance, shabbily but flashily dressed, with sallow complexion and eyes set close together. He was engaged at that particular moment in polishing a large diamond pin upon the sleeve of his coat, which operation he suspended to gaze with much astonishment at this unlooked-for visitor. Trent had come straight from Ascot, straight indeed from his interview with Francis, and was still wearing his racing-glasses.

"I wish to see Mr. Da Souza," Trent said. "Is he in?"

"I believe so, sir," the boy answered. "What name?"

"Trent! Mr. Scarlett Trent!"

The door of an inner office opened, and Da Souza, sleek and curled, presented himself. He showed all his white teeth in the smile with which he welcomed his visitor. The light of battle was in his small, keen eyes, in his cringing bow, his mock humility.

"I am most honored, Mr. Trent, sir," he declared. "Welcome back to England. When did you return?"

"And you have come," Da Souza continued, "fresh from the triumphs of the racetrack. It is so, I trust?"

"I have come straight from Ascot," Trent replied, "but my horse was beaten if that is what you mean. I did not come here to talk about racing though. I want a word with you in private."

"With much pleasure, sir," Da Souza answered, throwing open with a little flourish the door of his sanctum. "Will you step in? This way! The chair is dusty. Permit me!"

Trent threw a swift glance around the room in which he found himself. It was barely furnished, and a window, thick with dust, looked out on the dingy back-wall of a bank or some public building. The floor was uncovered, the walls were hung with yellow maps of gold-mines all in the West Africa district. Da Souza, himself spick and span, with glossy boots and a flower in his buttonhole, was certainly the least shabby thing in the room.

"You know very well," Trent said, "what I have come about. Of course you'll pretend you don't, so to save time I'll tell you. What have you done with Monty?"

Da Souza spread outwards the palms of his hands. He spoke with well-affected impatience.

"Monty! always Monty! What do I want with him? It is you who should look after him, not I!"

Trent turned quietly round and locked the door. Da Souza would have called out, but a paroxysm of fear had seized him. His fat, white face was pallid, and his knees were shaking. Trent's hand fell upon his shoulder, and Da Souza felt as though the claws of a trap had gripped him.

"If you call out I'll throttle you," Trent said. "Now listen. Francis is in England and, unless Monty is produced, will tell the whole story. I shall do the best I can for all of us, but I'm not going to have Monty done to death. Come, let's have the truth."

Da Souza was grey now with a fear greater even than a physical one. He had been so near wealth. Was he to lose everything?

"Mr. Trent," he whispered, "my dear friend, have reason. Monty, I tell you, is only half alive, he hangs on, but it is a mere thread of life. Leave it all to me! Tomorrow he shall be dead!—oh, quite naturally. There shall be no risk! Trent! Trent!"

His cry ended in a gurgle, for Trent's hand was on his throat.

"Listen, your miserable hound," he whispered. "Take me to him this moment, or I'll shake the life out of you. Did you ever know me go back from my word?"

Da Souza took up his hat with an ugly oath and yielded. The two men left the office together.

"Listen!"

The two women sat in silence, waiting for some repetition of the sound. This time there was certainly no possibility of any mistake. From the room above their heads came the feeble, quavering sobbing of an old man. Julie threw down her book and sprang up.

"Mother, I cannot bear it any longer," she cried. "I know where the key is, and I am going into that room."

Mrs. Da Souza's portly frame quivered with excitement.

"My child," she pleaded, "don't Julie, do remember! Your father will know, and then—oh, I shall be frightened to death!"

"It is nothing to do with you, mother," the girl said, "I am going."

Mrs. Da Souza produced a capacious pocket handkerchief, reeking with scent, and dabbed her eyes with it. From the days when she too had been like Julie, slim and pretty, she had been every hour in dread of her husband. Long ago her spirit had been broken and her independence subdued. To her friend and confidants no word save of pride and love for her husband had ever passed her lips, yet now as she watched her daughter she was conscious of a wild, passionate wish that her fate at least might be a different one. And while

she mopped her eyes and looked backward, Julie disappeared.

Even Julie, as she ascended the stairs with the key of the locked room in her hand, was conscious of unusual tremors. If her position with regard to her father was not the absolute condition of serfdom into which her mother had been ground down, she was, at least, afraid of him, and she remembered the strict commands he had laid upon them all. The room was not to be opened save by himself. All cries and entreaties were to be disregarded, every one was to behave as though that room did not exist. They had borne it already for days, the heart-stirring moans, the faint, despairing cries of the prisoner, and she could bear it no longer. She had a tender little heart, and from the first it had been moved by the appearance of the pitiful old man, leaning so heavily upon her father's arm, as they had come up the garden walk together. She made up her mind to satisfy herself at least that his isolation was of his own choice. So she went boldly up the stairs and thrust the key into the lock. A moment's hesitation, then she threw it open.

Her first impulse, when she had looked into the face of the man who stumbled in fear at her entrance, was to then and there abandon her enterprise—for Monty just then was not a pleasant sight to look upon. The room was foul with the odor of spirits and tobacco smoke. Monty himself was unkempt and unwashed, his eyes were bloodshot, and he had fallen half across the table with the gesture of a drunken man. At the sight of him her pity died away. After all, then, the sobbing they had heard was the maudlin crying of a drunken man. Yet he was very old, and there was something about the childish, breathless fear with which he was regarding her which made her hesitate. She lingered instead, and finding him tongue-tied, spoke to him.

"We heard you talking to yourself downstairs," she said, "and we were afraid that you might be in pain."

"Ah, he muttered, "That is all, then! There is no one behind you—no one who wants me!"

"There is no one in the house," she assured him, "save my mother and myself."

He drew a little breath which ended in a sob.

"You see," he said vaguely, "I sit up here hour by hour, and I think that I fancy things. Only a little while ago I fancied that I heard Mr. Walsh's voice, and he wanted the mission-box, the wooden box with the cross, you know. I keep on thinking I hear him. Stupid, isn't it?"

She smiled weakly, and his bony fingers stole round the tumbler which stood by his side. She shook her head at him smiling, and crossed over to him. She was not afraid any more.

"I wouldn't drink if I were you," she said, "it can't be good for you, I'm sure!"

"Good," he answered slowly, "it's poison—rank poison."

"If I were you," she said, "I would put all this stuff away and go for a nice walk. It would do you much more good."

He shook his head.

"I daren't," he whispered. "They're looking for me now. I must hide—hide all the time!"

"Who are looking for you?" she asked.

"Don't you know? Mr. Walsh and his wife! They have come over after me!"

"Why?"

"Didn't you know," he muttered, "that I am a thief?"

She shook her head.

"No, I certainly didn't. I'm very sorry!"

He nodded his head vigorously a great many times.

"Won't you tell me about it?" she asked.

"Was it anything very bad?"

"I don't know," he said. "It's so hard to remember! It is something like this! I seem to have lived for such a long time, and when I look back I can remember things that happened a very long time ago, but then there seems a gap, and every thing is all misty, and it makes my head ache dreadfully to try and remember," he moaned.

"Then don't try," she said kindly. "I'll read to you for a little time if you like, and you shall sit quite quiet."

He seemed not to have heard her. He continued presently—

"Once before I died, it was all I wanted. Just to have heard her speak, to have seen my little girl grown into a woman, and the sea was always there, and Oom Sam would always come with that cursed rum. Then one day came Trent and talked of money, and spoke of England, and when he went away it rang for ever in my ears, and at night I heard her calling for me across the sea. So I stole out, and the great steamer was lying there with red fires at her funnel, and I was mad. She was crying for me across the sea, so I took the money!"

She patted his hand gently. There was a lump in her throat, and her eyes were wet.

"Was it your daughter you wanted so much to see?" she asked softly.

"My daughter! My little girl!" he answered. "And I heard her calling to me with her mother's voice across the sea. So I took the money."

"No one would blame you very much for that, I am sure," she said cheerfully. "You are frightening yourself needlessly. I will speak to father, and he shall help you."

He held up his hand.

"He is hiding me," he whispered. "It is through him I knew that they were after me. I don't mind for myself, but she might get to know, and

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Potatoes as Hog Feed.

Many experiments have been conducted to determine the value of potatoes of feed for swine. In Ireland and Germany farmers feed large quantities of potatoes annually. From experimental data it has been concluded that four to 4½ bushels of potatoes when cooked are equal to about one bushel of corn for putting gains on hogs. Therefore, if corn is worth 80 cents a bushel, potatoes when fed to hogs would be worth only eighteen to twenty cents a bushel. There may, however, be instances where it would be more advantageous for the farmer to feed to hogs right on his own place at least part of his crop rather than to haul these potatoes to an already overloaded market.

According to the consensus of opinion, potatoes are fed to the best advantage when cooked or steamed and mixed with other feeds. Experiments in which raw potatoes were fed alone have been reported. In certain instances the raw potatoes are said to have caused scours. However, raw potatoes in small quantities and in diet lacking succulence may be conducive to health in pigs.

In cooking potatoes, only enough water should be used to make a mealy mash and prevent burning. The resultant meal should then be mixed with cornmeal or other grain supplement. Tankage, skim-milk or meat meal would probably add to the profit of the mixture. Potatoes when prepared in the manner described and under the conditions mentioned can often be fed to pigs with advantage.

Profit in Good Seed Potatoes.

The right kind of potatoes bring better prices than the wrong kind, and the right kind can usually be grown with very little added trouble.

The right kind of potatoes is the kind the public wants. To find out the taste of the public as to potatoes, D. E. Willard of the Northern Pacific Railway company not long ago made an extended investigation—in homes, hotels, restaurants, and commission houses. He found the demand was for sound potatoes, of good flavor, medium size, and regular shape. He also found that such potatoes commanded higher prices than mixed lots of large and small, diseased and sound, regularly and irregularly shaped potatoes.

I have brought disgrace enough upon her. Listen!"

There were footsteps upon the stairs. He clung to her in an agony of terror.

"They are coming!" he cried. "Hide me! Oh, hide me!"

But she too was almost equally terrified, for she had recognized her father's tread. The door was thrown open and Da Souza entered, followed by Scarlett Trent.

CHINESE STYLES.

Severe Fashions of the Republic Will Disappear.

Chinese dressmakers, milliners and tailors are all in a flurry over the announcement that under the prospective monarchy fashions will be quite unlike those of the Republic. So sure are the government officials of the result of the coming elections that the Bureau of Rites has been instructed to prepare regulations for the etiquette of the monarchy.

Under the Republic the costumes and rules of conduct were wholly unlike those which prevailed in Imperial China. Specific regulations were drawn up as to the height of the stovepipe hats which men were to wear on state occasions. The old Prince Albert coat, which European capitals have long ago discarded, was elevated to a place of distinction. In warm weather distinguished gentlemen calling upon the President were permitted to wear a Prince Albert of unlined alpaca.

THREE VITAL QUESTIONS

Are you full of energy, vital force, and general good health? Do you know that good digestion is the foundation of good health? Pains and oppression in stomach and chest after eating, with constipation, headache, dizziness, are sure signs of indigestion. Mother Seigel's Syrup, the great herbal remedy and tonic, will cure you.

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Fashion Hints

Gossip About the Styles.

It is quite heartbreaking this season to take out the wraps and frocks of last year; for, almost without exception, they lack the necessary fullness. Particularly in the case of an evening wrap, where the material is in good condition, it is provoking to find the style passe. The majority of the coats of last season were narrow of shoulder and continued along a straight narrow way to the bottom of the dress. This year shoulders may still be narrow, but the bottom of the wrap must be flaring. Therefore, a good scheme in remodeling is to add a broad circular flounce of a contrasting material to the coat. The same plan may be followed in giving width to the bottom of the sleeves. A new collar on the order of the monk's cowl may be added to the neck, and the turn-over sections on each side of the collar may be faced with fur; perhaps some of the fur from a last season's coat may be utilized in this way. Bits of embroidery make a lovely trimming for the top of the flounce and the sleeves, and also for the collar, but this is not necessary. A band of fur, or a gold cord, may conceal the joining of the set-on piece and the old part of the wrap. It is not necessary, moreover, that the new material should match the old; it may harmonize in color, or it may be in a vivid contrast. In any case, it is better not to try to match the material. In a velvet wrap the hem should be of faille, and in a faille wrap the hem should be of velvet.

The rag of tulle fluttering stringily about the neck is played out. The daintily shaped shoulders of the new gowns and waists, quite as transparent, quite as dainty, as the gathered tulle or net or chiffon, now show a bit of handwork, an edge outlined with a darker line and something to give a more substantial silhouette to the shoulder, covering without taking away from the delicacy of the costume. It is remarkable to note how much elegance the restoration of the shoulder has in the anatomy of the dress.

Little insets of white leather and hand embroidered eyelets are used as trimming on some of the dark dress boots, and black patent kid sandal bands and trimming of inconspicuous kinds are popular.

Then there are the sturdier boots for street wear, boots with high tops or tops of ordinary height, with Cuban, Spanish or less practical Louis heels. These are all in black, all tan, in black or tan, with contrasting tops or contrasting trimmings. Tan calfskin with dark wavy tops and tan trimmings is about the most inconspicuous of the sportier walking boots; but tan, fawn or gray tops with black patent or leather vamps are still much worn. Of the white and black boots so distressingly abused last season little is seen where really well-dressed women gather.

YOUR WRIST WATCH.

Some of the Great Wonders of Its Mechanism.

It is a marvel of minute workmanship. It is one of the most wonderful things the human hand fashions. Some of its screws are so small that 180,000 go to the pound!

The pivot of the balance-wheel has a diameter measured by the two-hundredth part of an inch, and, more marvellous still, in order that the pivot may have free play, the jewel-hole into which it fits is exactly one five-thousandth part of an inch larger!

The gauge which enables this to be done measures to the ten-thousandth part of an inch.

But not only are the screws of a watch as minute as its bolts, but they have a thread, just like the big screws you drive into the door, but the thread of the watch's screw has as many as 260 turns to the inch!

What do you think the jewels in your wrist-watch weigh? What is called a pallet jewel weighs a pound when there are 150,000 of them, and of the roller jewel it would need 256,000.

The largest round hair-spring stud in your watch is four-hundredths of an inch in diameter and nine-hundredths of an inch in length.

You did not realize till now what a marvellous piece of human ingenuity and skill you were carrying about with you. Yet the structure of the eye of the common house-fly is to the wrist-watch what the watch is to a creaky old beam engine of the days of Watt!

Think it over.

An easterly wind, being dry, imbibes the air, moisture, and thus prevents dew.