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"A GOLD LADEN DERELICT"
OR
The Impecunious Adventuress.
CHAPTER XXII
THE SINNER'S APPEAL.

The faithful Crudge heard the cry, and ran into Kenneth's room, and found him lying with his head on the desk, and his arms hanging down limply.

He managed to drag him out of the chair and lay him down on the floor; then his eye caught the letter; he read it and slipped it into one of the drawers.

"No use for the doctor or any one to see that," he muttered, as he left the room.

He went out into the street, and by good luck saw a messenger boy sauntering toward the Strand, with the air of one who has performed a mission. He beckoned to him, and the boy immediately quickened his footsteps.

"Look here," Crudge said, "if you're not engaged I want you to go as fast as you can for Doctor Marston. You know where his consulting rooms are—14, Number Five Court. Tell him that Mr. Markham—Mr. Kenneth Markham, you know—has been taken suddenly ill, and ask him to come at once."

The boy, hearing—the celebrated name, darted off full of the importance of his mission, and Mr. Crudge went back to take off Kenneth's collar and rub his hands, but without success; the shock had been too terrible, and the blow too heavy.

The doctor arrived within ten minutes, and at once sent Mr. Crudge for some brandy; but, in spite of all that could be done, it was nearly half an hour before Kenneth drew one deep breath and opened his eyes.

They raised him to a sitting position and gave him a little more brandy.

He looked about him almost blindly for a moment, and said, in a muttering tone:

"That letter! I've lost it! Lillas, Lillas! No, no, it can't be true—can't be true! Eh? Oh, is that you, Crudge—and you, Doctor Marston? Have I been ill?"

Every word came more strongly and distinctly. The powerful intellect was resuming its mastery. With their help he rose to his feet and they put him in his chair.

"You've been overworking Mr. Markham. This won't do, you know. Overwork beats the best of us in the long run. Now, you must get home. No cases to-day."

"No case to-day, fortunately, doctor," said Mr. Crudge.

"Ah, good! Now, Mr. Markham, my prescription is a day's holiday, if possible, in pleasant society. A half bottle of good champagne at lunch won't do you any harm; but no work, mind; and, above all things, no worry."

"No worry?" murmured Kenneth to himself half an hour later, as he was driving westward in a hansom. "No

worry? Good heavens, doctor, if you only knew! Now, there's nothing else for it, I must go and have it out."

He was still feeling a little faint and dizzy, and, remembering the doctor's advice, he stopped at his club, in St. James Street, ordered a small bottle of the best champagne, and sat down in a quiet corner of the almost deserted smoking room, to collect his thoughts and do half an hour's hard thinking over this terrible development before he went on to see Lillas.

Although it was an almost unheard-of thing for him to take any alcohol for lunch, or even dinner, he felt now the wine refreshing him both bodily and mentally, and when he got into his cab again his nerves were steadier and his brain clearer.

He found Lillas in the little drawing-room, pale and almost haggard. There were dark shadows under the lovely eyes, and the sweet lips were twitching and downdrawn at the corners.

"Oh, Kenneth!" she exclaimed, in a voice that was almost a wail, "how glad I am that you have come! But if you could only have come a couple of hours sooner!"

"Why, dearest?" he anxiously asked, as he took her in his arms and kissed her quivering lips.

"Because Aunt Gerty—you know I've told you that for some time past she has been getting very strange—went away with Nurse Meeson—the one we had at Hampstead, you know—soon after eleven, in a cab, and neither of them would tell me where she was going. She must have packed a dress trunk herself during the night. My aunt wouldn't even say good-by to me; she only said, in the most extraordinary way, that she was very ill; and declared I had not nursed her properly, and she was going away with Nurse Meeson, who would save her life, which I didn't seem to want to do. Then I had a scene with the nurse, who insulted me grossly; but that doesn't matter now. She said that my aunt had asked her to come and take her away; she was her own mistress, and I couldn't stop her going; in short, she told me to mind my own business, and they went. Oh, Kenneth, if you'd only been here to help me!"

"I wish I had been, darling. I meant to do so the moment I had got through my letters at the office; but—well, something happened to stop me. I am most, deeply sorry, dearest, for I know that if ever you wanted my help, you want it now."

"But why?" she said, looking up at him with questioning eyes. "You couldn't have known of this trouble about aunt."

"No, dearest," he replied, releasing her and taking his leader's letter out of his pocket. "It was something worse than that. Read this, Lillas, and, for our love's sake, tell me that you do not know how Sir Arthur died."

As she read the fateful lines, he saw her face grow gray and the pupils of her eyes dilate with horror or fear, or both.

A keen thrill of dread struck him like a dagger to the heart, and he shuddered like a man suddenly smitten with a mortal sickness. Yet his splendidly disciplined intellect acted automatically and remorselessly. To the lawyer, she appealed with a silent, infinite pathos.

"Well, Lillas?" he asked, in a voice that he did not recognize as his own. She looked at him for a moment,

with frigid features and wide-staring eyes—it was a look that he would remember on his deathbed—then she dropped the letter and flung herself on the couch, covering her face with her hands, and moaned:

"Kenneth, Kenneth; save me!"

In an instant he was on his knees beside her. He took her hot trembling hands into his and pressed them tenderly between his palms, all the while talking to her as if to a frightened child.

"Save you from what, Lillas?" he asked, after a few moments. "I don't understand you, dear. What has alarmed you? What do you fear, my darling? Save you from—"

"From myself, Kenneth," she moaned again. "I cannot bear this. If you do not help me, I shall kill myself! Oh, dearest, if you only knew, you would believe me, and pardon."

The words struck him like a blast of frozen air. He rose to his feet, and said almost sternly:

"Believe what? Pardon what, Lillas?"

But her only reply was:

"Save me, Kenneth! Save me!"

All this time a deadly fear had been growing upon him, a fear so horrible that it seemed impossible. Lillas, this angel of loveliness and graciousness, who had come into his life and transfigured it; Lillas—a—No! He could not even think the word. But, if not, what did her prayer mean? That was a question which must be answered.

With a desperate effort he braced his shaking nerves, and said, in a hard, almost harsh, tone:

"Lillas, before I can help you, before I will help you, you must tell me this: Had you any part or share, by any act of your own, in the death of Sir Arthur Eversley? It is agony to ask you, but you must answer it."

She turned her face up to him as she lay on the sofa. A shudder ran through her body, and her breast heaved as though she was choking, and twice he saw her white lips try to shape the words, and fail. Then she said, in a voice which sounded horribly unnatural to him:

"Kenneth, I didn't kill him; but—God be merciful to me—I let him die!"

He dropped her hands. They fell limply beside the edge of the sofa.

He rose slowly to his feet, looked with wavering eyes round the room, and murmured:

"Lillas, are you mad, or am I?"

"No, Kenneth, no!" she moaned, covering her eyes with her hands. "It is the truth—the bitter, horrible truth! But you will save me, Kenneth, won't you—oh, oh, I have loved you so!"

Loved him so! And he? Yes, love, stronger than death itself, might yet be strong enough to overcome even the horror with which her words had flooded his soul. And then sharply through the tumult that was raging through his being, the cold, clear voice of conscience spoke and said:

"Thou shalt do no murder!"

Was it murder that Lillas had confessed to, or was it not?


Instantly and instinctively the legal intellect setled upon the subtlety, and the love-filled heart whispered:

"She did nothing—it was not."

"Lillas, still my dearest," he said, taking her hands away from her face, "I will do all that I honorably can do, but I must leave you now and go and think somewhere by myself. It seems cruel to leave you in this state, but, believe me, it is absolutely necessary. There are a hundred things to consider that you know nothing of, and if I am to help you now, I can only do it alone."

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"Go, Kenneth, dearest, go!" she said, putting her hand out toward him. "Go, and think for me! I am very helpless and very miserable, but kiss me just once more—even if it is only to kiss good-by."

He hesitated for just a moment, then he took the outstretched hands, bent down, and kissed the upturned lips. It was not the first time in the world's history that the magic of a woman's kiss had stained the whiteness of a man's unpolluted honor.

When he had gone, Lillas raised herself from the sofa, not without an effort, and went into her bedroom. She let her hair down and pushed it back from her forehead, and bathed her face in cold water slightly clouded by a few drops of cologne, then she gave it a good, healthy rubbing with a soft, thick towel, and stood before the long mirror and said to the reflection she saw in it:

"Yes, he will help me. He will save me, at least for the time being. There are years to spare yet. He loves me and I love him—the first love this wretched life of mine has ever known! Surely the Fates owe me a few years' happiness. Why should I not take them with him, and when they are over there are many ways into the unknown. Yes, I can do it, and I will—I must!"

When Kenneth got into the Chiswick highroad, he saw an electric car stop. He wanted air and motion, so he mounted to the top and rode to Kew Bridge, the chaos of his thoughts gradually settling down to something like order.

At the bridge he got out and went into the Kew Gardens, but for all he saw of their beauty he might have been in a wilderness. His eyes guided his footsteps along the winding paths, but that was all. The outer world was nothing to him. His whole being was a battleground between heart and conscience, with the clear-trained intellect acting automatically as umpire of the strife.

When he left the gardens, just before the gates closed, he did not go home to Bedford Park. He walked to the Hotel Cecil, took a room, and the next morning Lillas received this note:

"Dearest: What love can do, love shall do. But you must tell me everything. I shall come and see you about ten o'clock to-morrow. Kenneth."

And when Lillas had read it, she kissed it and clasped it to her breast. "Yes, I knew he would," she murmured. "The Fates may give me a few more years of happiness yet."

CHAPTER XXIII.
AN EXTRAORDINARY TRIAL.

The scene in the new central criminal court, five weeks later, was both like and unlike that in the court of probate. The audience was almost the same, only rather more closely packed. Instead of the ushers, there were policemen and warders. Over the judge's seat hung the ominous sword of justice, and here there was not only the witness box, but the broad-fronted, oak-grained inclosures, something like a huge, family pew, which is often the antechamber to two worlds—one the world of monotonous, heart-breaking degradation, which is called penal servitude, from which it is possible to return, and the other "that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns," a world whose portals are the grave and gate of death.

Here, at eleven o'clock, on a gray, December morning, Lillas Ashley and Doctor Herbert Mathews took their places to answer the charge of conspiring to murder, and each or both of them causing the death, by means of poison or drugs, unlawfully administered, of Sir Arthur Eversley, baronet, captain of one of his majesty's regiments of lancers.

There was another difference, a slight but most significant one, between the drama of the probate court and the possible tragedy of the criminal court.

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3132

Pattern 3132 was selected for this design. It is cut in 3 Sizes: 16, 18 and 20 years. Size 18 will require 6 yards of 20 inch material. As here shown, crepe de chine was used in a new shade of blue. Embroidery in self color forms the decoration. Satin, serge, duvetyne, taffeta, velvet and poplin are attractive for this style. The skirt measures about 1 1/2 yard at its lower edge.

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3155

Pattern 3155 was selected for this dress. It is cut in 4 Sizes: 8, 10, 12, and 14 years. For a 14 year size 4 1/2 yards of 36 inch material will be required. In taffeta, serge, linen or shantung, this model will be pleasing. It may also be effectively developed in plaid suiting and serge of one color; likewise in voile, challie, foulard or batiste. The tunic may be omitted.

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