

"A GOLD LADEN DERELICT" OR The Impecunious Adventurers.

CHAPTER VII.
A WEALTHY HUMAN WRECK.

"Oh, hang it, you know," he said, as he took the cup, "after all this long time, can't we drop that sort of ceremony? Besides, you know, or I suppose you don't know, that I'm Sir Arthur Eversley now."

"Oh!"
The exclamation came at the same instant, but in different keys, from the lips of Mrs. Ashley and her aunt.

"Yes," he went on, with a slight drawl, which sounded rather curious after the announcement he had just made. "I thought perhaps you might have heard of it, though it only happened a week ago. Fact is, poor Frank's yacht got caught in a white squall off Corsica, turned turtle, and went down almost before you could say 'knife.' A boat was in sight, and when it was over, her people picked up what was left, and poor Frank's body was among the debris. It was an awful thing, and the news of it knocked me out of time, for I had just come home invalided from Somaliland, after a touch of sun, followed by fever, and it shook me up a good deal, I can assure you."

"Dear me, how very sad!" exclaimed Miss Gertrude Holroyd, in a tone which had more surprise than sympathy in it. "And your poor brother was unmarried, wasn't he?"

"My dear aunt," said Mrs. Ashley, with a softness which seemed very sweet to the man who had asked her to marry him when he was a poor lieutenant of lancers—that is to say poor, as lieutenants of crack cavalry regiments go—"how can you?"

Then, with a sudden change of tone, she continued: "Really, that is almost too terrible! Poor Sir Francis! To die like that, when he had all the world before him and almost everything that the world could give him. So now you are Sir Arthur?"

"Yes," he said, putting his teacup down with a rattle in the saucer, "Sir Arthur Eversley. One of the richest baronets in the kingdom, I believe, and more or less of a wreck, at that. Wounds, sunstroke, fever, invalided out of the army, Eversley Hall, house in Prince's Gate, forty thousand a year, and the remains of a constitution wrecked in his gracious majesty's service that no company in England would insure for a thousand pounds. Pretty rough—what do you call it? Oh, that's it—irony of fate, isn't it?"

It was impossible for either Lillias Ashley or her aunt not to notice the peculiar hesitation, the waiting for words which did not at once interpret the thoughts, and the general indecision of manner which, to the seeing eyes, are infallible symptoms of weakened intellect and will. Both women diagnosed the case with equal correctness, and they both drew the same conclusions from it.

"I am afraid, Sir Arthur," said Miss Holroyd, with the utmost grace and gentleness she could command, "that

you are, well, a little run down—and, certainly, under the circumstances, it is no wonder that you are—and so you are taking a much too gloomy view. When you have had a few weeks in England, among your old friends, and got back to your old amusements and pursuits, I think you will be much better able to appreciate the blessings, however they may be at present disguised, which Providence has been pleased to bestow upon you. What is your opinion, Lillias?"

"I think you are perfectly right, aunt," replied Mrs. Ashley, with a glance which had more meaning in it than Sir Arthur could have had any idea of. Then, turning her lovely eyes upon him, she went on: "Really, serious as these things are, you must not take them too seriously. For the time being you have sacrificed your health in your country's service; but there is no reason why, with proper care and good medical advice, you should not regain it. Still, this is hardly the place to discuss one's private affairs in; and, besides, I think it is about time we were thinking about getting home, aunt."

The black-fringed eyelids fell as she turned to Miss Holroyd, and from under them shot a glance that was a command.

"I am afraid it is, Sir Arthur," she said, finishing her third cup of tea and beginning to get her impedimenta together. Then she looked up and said, in an impersonal sort of way: "I wonder if Sir Arthur has any particular engagement for this evening. Of course, he must have so many now."

"No, really, Miss Holroyd," he eagerly exclaimed. "I can assure you that I have nothing—er—absolutely nothing—er—on. I mean, of course, that I am completely disengaged."

The pansy eyes were looking into his as he spoke, and checked their wavering for a moment. He had looked into them with hopeless longing in other days, when he was a poorer and a better man, and they had sent him away to the outlands of the earth, to seek the fate which he had found. But now there seemed to be in them encouragement, which set his enfeebled pulses beating with renewed strength.

"Well, if that is so," said Miss Holroyd, still in the same impersonal tone, "perhaps Sir Arthur might like to renew an old acquaintance by dining with us to-night?"

"I should be pleased beyond measure—er—delighted, I can assure you. It is—er—most kind of you, and—er—if you will be good enough to tell me when and where I—er—mean your address and what time, I—er—"

"Aunt, I haven't a card with me, but I think you have," interrupted Mrs. Ashley, as he began to flounder in his speech again. "But we ought to tell you, Sir Arthur," she went on, turning to him again, "that you will

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have to be content with somewhat humble fare. The truth is, I have lost nearly all the little fortune that my husband left me, in those horrid, swindling Markham companies, and my aunt has suffered heavily, too, so that we are quite poor now."

There was an undertone of pathos in her voice as she said this, which went straight to his heart, a heart which, before disease and drink had done their deadly work upon him, had been instinct with all the chivalry of an English gentleman.

"My dear Lillias—I—er—really, I beg your pardon—you see, I—er—don't know your other name yet—"

"Lillias is Mrs. Ashley now," murmured Miss Holroyd.

"Oh—ah—yes—Mrs. Ashley. Thank you. How strange it seems to sound. I am awfully sorry to hear that. Swindling? I should think so. The scoundrel ought to have been hung before he died. Ah—that's rather Irish, I'm afraid; but, you know what I mean. It's all very well, this will that his son's put in the papers. It's only some dodge. I don't believe a word of it. And who knows how many more millions he's done the public out of."

"It is very sad and unfortunate," said Miss Holroyd, who had taken a card out of her bag; "but if we are going to talk about our troubles, perhaps we had better do that after dinner. This is our address, Sir Arthur, and we shall hope to see you a little after eight."

A quarter of an hour later he was lying back in one of the deep, cosy armchairs in the smoking room of the Army and Navy Club, with a brandy and soda on the little table beside him, and a long cigar between his teeth, thinking of many things, but mostly of the perfect face and the lovely eyes whose unattainable beauty had driven him mad five years before, and which, thanks to this strange chance meeting, had now inspired him with a dim, half-formed hope that, after all—gold-laden derelict on the sea of life as he was—that she, if she only would, might save him even now, save him both mentally and physically, and out of the magic of her womanhood give him back the manhood that he had lost through hopeless love of her.

CHAPTER VIII. HIS FATE DECIDED.

The address on the card which Miss Gertrude Holroyd had given to Captain Eversley was No. 13A Othello Mansions, Chiswick, and when he had got into his evening clothes and pulled himself together, by the usual means, he got into his limousine, and, as it rolled away smoothly and quietly on its rubber tires into what in the old days he had been accustomed to call the wilderness of the west, he settled himself down to do a certain amount of hard thinking, or, at least, as hard thinking as he could accomplish in his present condition.

The chance meeting outside Swan & Edgar's, and the subsequent conversation at the tea table in the Cabin, had in a certain sense given him what is commonly called a new lease of life. He had certain escapades, but he had only been in love once, and, therefore, the girl widow, who was now Lillias Ashley, was mistress of himself and his new-found fortunes. He had relations which he now called his brother's relations, two elderly sisters, unmarried and well provided for by jointure paid out of the estate; and a cousin, Mr. Arthur Ashley, the son of an uncle who had kept up the seedtime of wild oats until past middle age, and had reaped the harvest, in a combination of gout and apoplexy nearly ten years before, within a few days of his fifty-fifth birthday.

In the days when he wanted money badly, his aunts had given him to understand that he had forfeited all claim to their sympathy and help by his reckless manner of living. His

cousin had traded upon his necessities, as he thought them then, and got him into the clutches of Henry Montagu to such an extent that only a sort of forced loan from his brother had saved him from bankruptcy, and the fatal alternative of resigning his commission.

Of course, their attitude toward him had very considerably changed now, but with that cunning which, with men in his condition, so often takes the place of cool reasoning, he had decided that they should now have from him what they had given him in the days when he wanted help—and that was nothing.

Only a few days before his cousin had almost gone down on his knees to ask him for a loan of five thousand pounds, an eighth of the annual rent roll which he was now incapable of spending with any real satisfaction or profit to himself. He had laughed at him, and told him to go to Montagu & Co. for a loan; and Mr. Arthur Ashley had departed, cursing him in his soul, if he had one, and trying to think out schemes of vengeance, one, at least, of which gave some reasonable promise of fulfillment.

But here the kindly fates had brought him face to face with the woman, or, as he chose to think of her, the widowed girl who five years before had been his first and only love. He had lost her through a freak of fortune; and now it seemed possible that fortune might give her back to him.

If so, what might not she give back to him—the old love renewed, the love of the man and the woman, instead of the unreasoning love of the boy and the girl. With such love, what more might not come—renewed manhood and the strength of will and self-respect that he had half lost; something to live for; an object in living to which he could devote himself heart and soul, and by such devotion win back the self-respecting manhood which had once been his birthright and heritage.

Yes, if there were for him anything left in life worth living for, it was incarnate in the perfect form and the lovely face which he had dreamed of, waking and sleeping, for the last five years of hunger and thirst and battle, tempered by wounds and disease, during which he had sought death as a release from the torture of his hopeless passion, and which, after all, had ended in such a commonplace fashion—a meeting in Regent Street, a handshake, afternoon tea, and an invitation to dinner with his long-worshipped goddess and her two maiden aunts.

What else in all the world was there to compare with her, with the possible realization of that boyish ideal of his? She was his one chance of renewed love, and life, and hope. What would this suddenly bestowed gift of fortune be to him, without her? Nothing, or something worse than nothing. Just an easy descent into the inferno on whose brink he has already standing, inferno of drink and drugs, dissipation and disease; then death, the ignoble end of a useless life, which he had risked again and again in his country's service, trying to find an honorable termination to an existence which his hopeless love had made worthless to him.

But with her, with Lillias as his wife, sharer of his new-found fortunes and mistress of his fate, how different the rest of his life might be. It was the difference between autumn and spring, and those lovely eyes of hers should be—

The limousine turned sharply to the right out of the Chiswick highroad, and the chauffeur pulled up sharply under a twinkling glare of electric light before the arched entrance of Othello Mansions.
(To be continued.)
The overblouse should always harmonize with the skirt.
A novelty material for underwear is the new painted batiste.

Fashion Plates.

A SMART SUIT FOR EARLY FALL.



2926—For this style, tricotine, serge, taffeta, velour, gabardine, or velvetene could be used. The vest may be of contrasting material as illustrated or of the cloth, braided or embroidered. The skirt is cut so that the side seam edges may be unconfined at ankle length, but if preferred, the seam may be closed.

The Pattern is cut in 7 Sizes 34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 44 and 46 inches bust measure. Size 38 requires 4 yards of 54 inch material. Width of skirt at lower edge is about 1 1/2 yards.

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