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"A GOLD LADEN DERELICT" OR The Impecunious Adventuress.

CHAPTER XI.
HELD BY THE ENEMY.

Moreover, before installing Eversley in the house at Hampstead, the astute physician had also had an interview with the Honorable Arthur Ashley before taking charge of the case, which had satisfied him that he would make a very handsome profit by using his professional position to legalize what was, to all intents and purposes, a deliberately planned and carefully thought-out act of murder.

He had made a very careful examination of his patient, and he had arrived at an entirely accurate opinion as to his condition. To begin with, there had been malarial fever, which had left incurable results behind it. Then had come a rather severe attack of heat apoplexy, which is commonly known as sunstroke, although it occurs more commonly in a heated atmosphere under clouded skies. After this, the usual consequences had followed, a weakening of will power and self-control, a craving for stimulants, and for drugs to counteract their effects, loss of appetite, and general mental and physical debility.

Doctor Mathews, after he had made his first examination, expressed what, in a certain sense, were really his convictions, very clearly to Mrs. Ashley and her aunt.

"I have no fear, my dear ladies," he said, on the evening of the day on which his patient had been installed in his new quarters, "of making a complete cure, provided always that proper precautions are taken. The constitution has been weakened to some extent by disease. Malarial fever always leaves behind it certain after effects, which are generally incurable, but which, with care, can be to a very great extent suppressed; but, of course, Sir Arthur's case is made much more serious by the unfortunate attack of what is commonly called sunstroke, after the malaria. That is mainly responsible for the unhappy tendency toward alcohol and drugs, which is, of course, the worst symptom of our distinguished patient's case."

"Yes," murmured Miss Holroyd, "it is really very sad, very sad indeed, that a man with such a record as Sir Arthur should be afflicted with this terrible falling."

"Of course it is, aunt," added Lillas, who was growing more and more impatient with her aunt's useless lamentations. "But that is just the work that we have to do, under Doctor Mathews' direction, and, if a cure is possible—"

She looked at the doctor with a smile on her lips and a note of interrogation in each of her eyes, and he took the hint, and said, in his best professional manner:

"My dear Mrs. Ashley, I do not think you need have any fear on that score. It is not so much a matter of medicine as of treatment; in other words, you, as nurse, can do a great deal more than I can as a doctor. I need hardly remind you that great care will have to be exercised in the gradual reduction of the quantities of alcohol and morphia which Sir Arthur is permitted to take. In some cases we find it advisable to stop everything at once, but in such a case as his, complicated with disease, the shock to the system would be too great to be risked."

"I quite see what you mean," said Lillas. "Just a little less spirits every day, until we get down to none. Meanwhile, light wines to take their place, and at night less chloral and morphia gradually, until Sir Arthur is able to sleep without them."

"My dear madam," said Doctor Mathews, smiling and rubbing his hands softly together, "I think that Sir Arthur Eversley is doubly fortunate in finding such a friend and such a nurse as yourself. You have described the proper treatment exactly, and all that you have left for me to do is just to prescribe my tonics, which will gradually take the place of and diminish the desire for the drugs and stimulants. There is, however, one point which it is my duty to mention, because it is a very important one."

"And that is, doctor?" murmured Lillas again, with the notes of interrogation in her eyes.

"It is this," replied the specialist, speaking slowly and seriously: "The medicine which I shall prescribe will increase in strength as the desire for stimulants and drugs decreases, and it is most important, in fact, I may say essential, that the quantities taken be very carefully observed."

"Oh, I think you can rely upon our doing everything in that way that is necessary, doctor," said Miss Holroyd, a little stiffly. "Sir Arthur's is, of course, a most valuable life, and, as you know already, that my niece has refused to marry him until your cure has proved successful, naturally every care and attention that we can give—"

"My dear Miss Holroyd," said the doctor, as she paused, "there cannot be the slightest question as to that. What I was about to tell you is a purely professional matter which you ladies could not be expected to know. It is this: As I have just said, the medicines which I shall prescribe will reduce the effects of drugs and stimulants in the constitution of our patient, and I need hardly say that the remedies which I shall have to employ will be somewhat potent, and, therefore, any mistake might have very serious consequences."

"Ah, yes," said Lillas, looking fixedly at him again, "we shall have to be very careful about the doses as the treatment goes on."

"It is not only that, my dear Mrs. Ashley. The one danger is what I may perhaps call a fight between the remedy and the causes of the disease, with our patient's constitution as the battle ground. If, for instance, it happens that after our treatment had proceeded for three or four days, Sir Arthur, by any mischance, obtained access to a supply of morphia or chloral, and gave himself the dose that he thought he wanted, the consequences would be almost certainly fatal. Therefore I shall have to ask you to exercise the greatest care and attention in this respect."

"Quite so, doctor," said Lillas, rising from her chair. "That is a thing which I should never have thought of, and so both my aunt and myself are much obliged to you for mentioning it. We are to understand, then, that as the strength of your prescriptions is increased, alcohol and drugs are to be decreased, and that we must be very particular that Sir Arthur does not—well, I don't think there's any danger of that. He has promised me he will do everything he can to help us follow out the treatment faithfully; and I'm quite sure that ever if he had anything dangerous within reach, he would remember his promise, and not do anything foolish."

"My dear madam," replied Doctor Mathews, putting out his hand, "allow me to warn you not to be too sure. One of the gravest symptoms from which Sir Arthur Eversley is unfortunately suffering is the loss of will power and the sense of responsibility. You have no idea of the terrible temptation I may say, which alcohol or drugs present to a man or woman in his condition, especially during the critical stage of treatment. When the craving comes on, there is nothing that the victim of alcohol and drugs will not do to satisfy it, if the means are within reach. For the time being everything is forgotten except the craving and the possible relief. But I'm sure that until he is cured you ladies will be both will and conscience to Sir Arthur. Your care will guard him, and your strength will replace his temporary weakness. From what I have seen and heard to-day, I am quite sure that he could not possibly be in better hands. Now, I have a case to see, and I must be off. Don't worry about me; I will come in by the side door, and I shall have had supper. Good night, Miss Holroyd. Good night, Mrs. Ashley."

When he got into his own sanctum, he lit a cigar and helped himself to a generous glass of whiskey and soda. Then he went out, and, as he walked down the road he puffed thoughtfully at his cigar, and said to himself:

"Well, my dear Sir Arthur, if those good ladies really mean to put an end to your sufferings and your somewhat useless life, I'm afraid that I have pointed out to them the most innocent way of doing it. Still, a thousand pounds for a few days' medical attention is not bad pay. You, I dare say, would give me ten thousand for saving your life; but, unfortunately, I'm not in a position to treat with you, and so I'm afraid I shall have to leave your fate in the hands of Mrs. Lillas Ashley. Good heavens, what a perfectly lovely woman she is! If I were under thirty, I think I would rather be nursed and killed by her, than nursed and saved by any one else. Yet she doesn't seem to have any more human feeling, or any more sense of compassion, than a tigress!"

"I don't see any reason why it shouldn't be done at once, if we have

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really made up our minds to do it," said Lillas, to her aunt, after the doctor had left the room and she had closed the door behind him. "Everything is settled, and—well, it seems as though we were keeping the poor man in misery longer than is necessary. I've got the tablets, and I don't see why he shouldn't find them and the syringe to-night as well as later. Suppose you go up and give him a dose of his new medicine now—a good dose—and then I'll relieve the nurse for an hour or so, about eleven."

"Lillas," replied Miss Holroyd, rising somewhat heavily from her chair, "you are my own sister's daughter, and, therefore, to some extent, you have my blood in your veins; therefore, perhaps, I have the right to say that you are not only the most beautiful girl I have ever seen, but also the most callously wicked that I have ever heard of."

"Wicked, my dear aunt?" Lillas laughed, with smiling lips and dancing eyes. "Surely, after the experiences of the last four or five years, it isn't necessary for me to tell you that there is no such thing as good or evil in the world; it is merely a matter of expediency. Now, we won't argue the question any further. Just go up and give Sir Arthur his medicine, and tell the nurse that I shall be up about eleven. I've got one or two letters to write, and something to think about."

"Yes, Lillas, I dare say you have," said Miss Holroyd, with just a suspicion of a sniff as she walked toward the door. "I am beginning to feel very sorry that I allowed myself to be drawn into this business at all. What on earth would become of us if—well, if anything happened?"

"You mean if we are found out?" laughed Lillas again. "Well, you know you can't make omelets without breaking eggs, and that is one of the risks we must take."

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