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## "A GOLD LADEN DERELICT" OR The Impecunious Adventuress.

CHAPTER XIX.  
A LITTLE SURPRISE.

With the first word her soul seemed to leap into her voice, and she sang as only those who feel what they are singing can sing. Then she played one of Chopin's nocturnes, and her soul went into her fingers, and when she got up she had to resume her place at the instrument, and this time she sang "Remember or Forget," with a pathos and passion which exalted the somewhat commonplace words into real poetry.

When she arose and went back to her seat, Kenneth looked up and saw a mist of tears in her eyes, and understood why she had sung the song.

During the first week in September the little party broke up. Lillias and her aunt went back to their flat in Othello Mansions; Mercia returned to Liverpool to begin again the management of her father's household and endure with what patience she might his remarks on what he had told her; and Kenneth considered a breach of duty; and Kenneth installed his mother and sister in the modest but cozy little home that he had made ready for them in Bedford Park.

Then she went away to Norway to enjoy the Indian summer, which is often the most delightful time of year in Scandinavia, and also a time when those who want to be by themselves, as he did just then, can almost have the country for their own.

He came back a week before the courts opened, to get himself back into harness, as he put it, though, as a matter of fact, he had put in a very considerable amount of thinking among the fords and mountains.

The Eversley will case stood second on the list. The first was a somewhat highly flavored divorce case which was expected to provide pleasant entertainment for the smart women of London for about three or four days, the principal reason for this being that the respondent was one of the

prettiest and had been one of the most popular women in society.

As the day of the trial approached, Lillias' days of anxiety seemed to grow longer and her night of self-torture darker. Three days before the one for which the trial was set down, she was sitting alone in the drawing-room of the flat, just after breakfast, considering for the thousandth time the possibilities of escape from the fate which was looming dark on her life's horizon, when the maid knocked at the door and brought in Arthur Ashley's card.

She did not rise to receive her guest as he entered; she merely waved her hand toward a chair with an almost royal gesture, and said, in a low but sweetly clear tone:

"Good morning, Mr. Ashley. Be good enough to take a seat."

"It was not an invitation, it was an order, and Arthur Ashley stared at her for a moment in sudden surprise, but he obeyed.

"Good morning," said he, with an audible little snort of surprise. "You'll allow me to say that this is a rather curious reception, Lillias—"

"I must ask you to remember your manners, sir, if you have any, and address me by my proper title. If you are guilty of that familiarity again, I shall find means to make you regret it."

The imperiousness of her tone and manner absolutely astounded him, and he had an uncomfortable idea that something serious must have happened, but he replied, with just a suspicion of a sneer:

"Oh, very well, Mrs. Ashley, if you wish it so, I am, as you know, the last one who would wish to be rude to a lady. And now, as there is no need to waste either your time or mine, will you do me the favor of telling me why you have asked me to come and have a tete-a-tete talk with you after what you were kind enough to say to me that afternoon at Hampstead?"

"Because I wanted to see you on business," she said, in a voice so cold that he felt a little shiver in his nerves. "Because, in short, I wish to tell you that what I may perhaps call our partnership, must be dissolved at once."

"I hardly follow you," he said, his wonder still increasing. "Permit me to remind you that a dissolution of partnership requires the consent of both partners; or, in this case, of all; and I think it will be rather difficult to obtain the consent of the others."

"I don't think you will have very much difficulty in doing that."

"Yes, you, Mr. Ashley. I propose, in short, to ask you to become—well, my agent in the matter. No, don't interrupt me, please," she continued, as she saw her guest open his mouth and start in his chair. "When I have done,

you may give me your opinion of the situation. I need not refer to the past; you know it as well as I do; but I must remind you that I am now approaching a great crisis in my life, and I propose to approach it alone. A few weeks ago your friend, Mr. Walter Redman, sustained a serious loss, apparently by burglary."

The shot went home; Ashley's lips became white, and his skin turned ashen.

"Ah," she continued, before he could speak. "I see that we shall soon understand each other. Now tell me this, what would you and your friends give to know where those documents are?"

"I—I—well, to tell you the truth, Mrs. Ashley," he stammered, "this is such an utter surprise to me that I could not answer that question without consulting my—our—colleagues."

"Well, then," she said, with a little exasperating laugh, "I will tell you for nothing. They are in the hands of Inspector Edward Burnett, of Scotland Yard."

"Great heavens, Lillias, don't tell me that!" he exclaimed, starting to his feet. "I don't believe it! You couldn't possibly know it!"

"Sit down, Mr. Ashley, and don't get frightened before the time." She laughed again. "I do know it, whether you condescend to believe me or not. Naturally, I overlook your insult, considering the fact that you are in the habit of dealing with liars! Now listen. Inspector Burnett got hold of those documents by a lucky chance, but he does not know where they came from, or who fabricated them. Your confederate has so far kept faith with you. But Scotland Yard would give a good deal for that information, and I can give it."

"And ruin yourself!" interrupted Ashley, with another sneer.

"Certainly," she replied quietly.

"But my ruin would involve the ruin of the whole lot of you, for after this would come exposure after exposure, and I should think the resulting sentences would come to a considerable term of years. Now my proposal is this: Release me absolutely from the partnership, take no hostile action whatever against me, and I will keep my bargain with you, provided I win the case, and hold my tongue. But at the first sign of hostility, I will tell everything, and ruin myself to ruin you. You know me well enough to believe me. Those are my terms, neither more nor less. Discuss them with your accomplices as soon as possible, and let me know the result. Good morning."

She got up and put her finger on the bell button beside her.

The maid opened the door, and with a muttered "good morning" Mr. Walter Ashley walked out.

CHAPTER XX.  
A NOBLE ACT.

As soon as he reached a post office, Ashley sent Redman a telegram:

"Must see you at your office two o'clock without fail. Most urgent."

Then he took a cab to his club, thinking, as the French say, furiously, all the way, and had a hasty and uncomfortable lunch, which he washed down with brandy and soda instead of his usual half bottle of light wine.

When he reached the offices of Redman's Detective Agency, he found the chief sitting in his armchair, smoking a cigar and reading the racing news in one of the evening papers that are published early in the afternoon.

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"Well, my dear Ashley," he said, putting down the paper, "what's the meaning of all this? I hope you're not exaggerating matters, for I've put off a very important appointment to see you."

"You'll find this a precious lot more important, whatever it was," said Ashley, putting his hat and umbrella on the table and taking out his cigar case. "I've been to see the fair Lillias this morning. She sent me a note last night, asking me to call. I wondered what the deuce she wanted me for, and when I got there I found that my lady had sent for me to make terms, and she did me the honor to appoint me her agent for the making of them."

"Well, of all the internal impudence!" exclaimed Redman. "What the dickens does she want to make terms about? She's made 'em, and, what's more, she's got to stick to 'em."

"You just wait till you've heard what I have to tell you," replied Ashley, "and perhaps you will take a different view of the matter. The thing's almost incredible, but I'm afraid it's true."

"All right, then, get along," said Redman, a little uneasily, for there was no mistaking Ashley's earnestness.

"Well, to begin with, I believe you lost, a short time ago, some documents which you accounted pretty valuable."

"Did I, really?" said Redman, taking the cigar out of his mouth and staring him straight in the eyes. "And may I ask how you know that?"

"Lillias told me. And, what is more, she told me where they are now."

"Look here, Ashley, what kind of a fairy tale is this you're giving me? If I have lost any papers, I should think you know more about them than any one else, to tell you the truth."

"Thanks!" laughed Ashley. "You can think just what you please about that! But to come to business, Lillias must know, simply because she cannot possibly have known of their present whereabouts unless she had also known that you had lost them."

"And where might their present whereabouts be?" asked Redman, with visible uneasiness.

"At Scotland Yard, in the keeping of Inspector Burnett!"

"They—they are!" exclaimed Redman, jumping to his feet. "Look here, Ashley, I don't care whether you stole them, or whether you had them stolen, though I believe you are responsible for the theft, but this is a serious matter. The things are gone, and if Burnett has got hold of them, and he can trace them to me, it'll give him just the very hold of use that he's been looking for for years, and then the devil only knows what will happen!"

"Exactly," said Ashley; "but don't get excited over it, and I'll tell you the rest."

Redman sat down, biting the end of his cigar, and Ashley went on and told him the terms that Lillias had proposed to him.

(To be continued.)

## Fashion Plates.

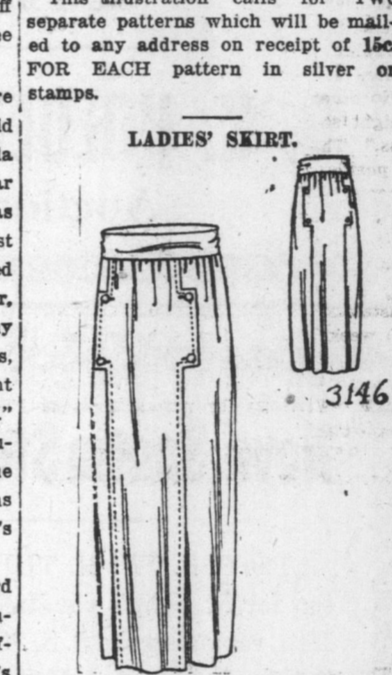
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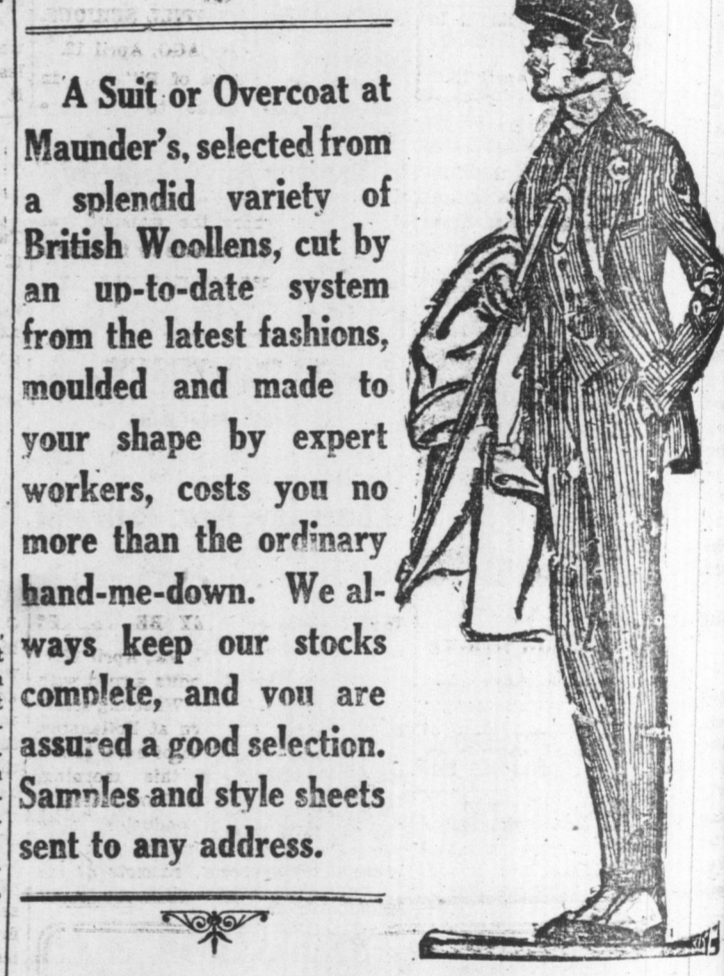
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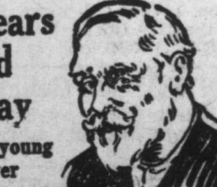
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