



"A GOLD LADEN DERELICT" OR The Impecunious Adventurers.

CHAPTER V.
THE PRICE OF INFAMY.

"Cookson, my dear boy," laughed Mr. Montagu, through a puff of cigar smoke, "you have just missed being a great man. If a man could only be as honest as you look, why, Kenneth Markham himself wouldn't be in it with you. I remembered that you swindled me in the first deal that we had together, but it was worth it just to know you."

"Thank you, my dear Montagu," said the elderly junior partner, with a smile, which the financier remembered later on. "Such a compliment from you sir, is well worth having. Still, if you will excuse me saying so, that doesn't get us very much nearer to the point."

"In other words, gentlemen," said Ashley, putting his empty glass down on the table, "what about that odd million?"

"No chance, I am afraid, unless—yes, unless, when the documents relating to the Markham group of companies come to be investigated, there could be found among them either an assignment by our late lamented friend in favor of one of the recent companies, say the North Western Exploration or the Burro-Burro Consolidated; or, if such a thing didn't happen to materialize, how about underwriting? Suppose, for instance, it were to be found that the senior Markham had underwritten the shares of those two companies, it wouldn't much matter what sort of will he had left; the estate would be liable to the creditors, wouldn't it?"

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Cookson, who always felt that, in spite of three failures to pass the final examination of the law society, he was, nevertheless, fully entitled to pass a legal opinion. "Yes, there could be no doubt about that. The only difficulty is that dead men can't sign deeds or policies,

and I don't think that Mr. Markham ever executed such a document."

"Well, for the matter of that," said Mr. Redman, leaning back in his chair and blowing a cloud of smoke toward the gray-brown ceiling, "I've got some stamped paper here that would serve the purpose—stamped a month or so ago, I mean—and it's worth trying. There are three promoters of those companies in this room, and we know of two more who will do as they are told, and so it's just a question of the late lamented's signature. Mr. Ashley, you're not a bad hand at that sort of thing—what'll you do for?"

"Hang it all, Redman, you needn't put it quite as bluntly as that," exclaimed Mr. Arthur Ashley, with a good imitation of a flush of honest shame on his artificially sun-tanned cheeks. "Of course, we're all friends here, but still there are limits, you know."

"Yes, there are," laughed Mr. Redman, "limits even to the patience of certain people; and you will perhaps excuse me if I remind you that your somewhat expensive services have not brought any hard cash returns to the firm for some considerable period; and—well, you know even the best-natured of people get tired in time."

No one knew better than Arthur Ashley, private inquiry agent and aristocratic social spy what a threat like this meant, coming from the lips of a man who knew more about the infamies which are hidden under the splendid exterior of the fashionable world than were known to any other man in London, or, perhaps, in Europe.

No one was more painfully aware of Redman's threat or more in dread of its execution than young Ashley, who knew, furthermore, that there were

one or two of those infamies with which his own name, and what he still considered to be the honor of his family, were so intimately connected, that it would be a somewhat perilous venture for him to refuse to obey any order which this smooth-faced, blue-eyed, perfectly groomed young man, who held his fate in the hollow of his hand, might choose to give him.

"It's an infernally difficult sort of job, you know, and there's a lot of risk attached to it," he said, getting up and pouring out another glass of champagne for himself; "but I haven't any great reason to love either Mr. Kenneth Markham or his late lamented father, and so I'll have a try, if you like; but I tell you, Redman, I'll have to be the last one if it comes off. What's the price?"

"Five thousand pounds cash, and three slips of blue stamped paper, which, as you know, are evidence of the skill which you will, I hope, bring to bear on the successful carrying out of this little undertaking. Is that good enough?"

To Arthur Ashley the offer meant release from a slavery which was almost intolerable, the abolition of an ever-threatening doom, and money enough to begin the world again; what he still wanted to think himself, an honest man.

"Good enough," he said. "By gosh, I'll do it! Witness my hand and seal." He emptied his glass, snapped the stem between his fingers, and pitched the two pieces into the fireplace.

CHAPTER VI. A LEGAL DECISION.

While the conversation just recorded was taking place in Mr. Redman's private office in Pinstripes Circus, late on the afternoon of the day following the great financier's death, a very different scene was being enacted in the library at Heathercroft.

Mr. Hodgson, a clean-shaven, keen-eyed man of about fifty, who had filled the duplicate positions of general manager and confidential adviser to Mr. Markham; Doctor Harding, Lord Overbury, Sir Edward Stanhope, of the great firm of Stanhope & Son, who had acted as Mr. Markham's lawyers for the last twelve or fifteen years,

Mrs. Markham, Kate, and Kenneth, were assembled in a sort of deliberative council.

The principle subject of consideration was the difference between the last will which Mr. Markham had executed some ten years before and the one which death had just prevented him from signing the day before.

The first will, with the exception of liberal bequests to charities and substantial legacies to those who had worked well for him, either in his business or his household, had divided all that he possessed between Kenneth and Kate, subject to ample provision for their mother during her lifetime. The unexecuted will left Mrs. Markham and Kate dependent upon Kenneth's earnings at the bar. The splendid inheritance was given to others, men and women who he had never seen, but who had trusted him. Not even their own home and the furniture that it contained were theirs, if they obeyed what was really, though not legally, the last will and testament of the man who was lying dead upstairs.

Sir Edward had the original of the first will, and Kenneth had had a copy in his possession for the last four or five years. His father had given it to him on the evening of the day that he had won his first case, and after dinner it had been read out to his mother and Kate; for, as far as their own interests were concerned, there had never been any secrets of importance among these four people, who trusted each other so completely that secrets were as unnecessary as they would have been disagreeable.

Now the two wills had been read again, and a somewhat serious difference had arisen. The parties in this strange contest were equally divided, on the one side, Lord Overbury, Sir Edward, and Mr. Hodgson. On the other, Kenneth, his mother, and Kate. Mr. Hodgson was for the time being neutral. He was as hard and shrewd a man of business as you could find between the Cotton Exchange in Liverpool and the pit in Chicago, but he was also a man of unstained honor and unyielding principle. These were the two reasons why he had risen from a clerk's desk in the counting-house to the manager's chair, which, until a few days ago, had been the throne of a financial vicar.

"Really, I cannot see," said Sir Edward Stanhope, leaning back in his chair, and tapping the back of his left hand with his gold-rimmed glasses, "I cannot see the practical advantage to you or to any one else of acting upon the will which Mr. Markham wished to make yesterday. I think, during the last hour or so, we have discussed all the pros and cons, and, as you have asked me to give an opinion, that is it. In the first place, as my friend Kenneth knows perfectly well, it has no legal force whatever; and, in the second place, if you gave it legal force by means of a deed of gift, you would be simply throwing a splendid fortune away—for what? Simply to make good the losses of a lot of people who gambled upon my late friend Markham's great reputation as a successful financier. They believed, and they had reason to believe, that everything he touched would turn to gold. They simply followed him as they follow a favorite horse or jockey on the turf. It is not, perhaps, the most delicate way to put it, but I can assure you, my dear Mrs. Markham, that it is true. People who gamble in stocks and shares for profit are not a bit more to be pitied if they lose than the other fools who put their money on horses. They take their profits as the others take their winnings, without a thought for those who have lost. These people have lost, and my advice is, let them lose."

"But, my dear Sir Edward," said Mrs. Markham, looking at him, with a faint smile and an added light in her gray-blue eyes, "you don't seem to realize that these poor people—of course, I don't mean the professional speculators, but the others, those who really invested their savings in the companies—did so because they believed that my husband never had anything to do with enterprises that he didn't think perfectly sound. It was his honor that they trusted, and I am sure Kenneth and Kate will agree with me when I say that that honor must be redeemed."

(To be continued.)

Sleeves are longer. Waistcoats are in vogue. The suit coat will be long. Jet is still a popular trimming. Very smart is the dangling tassel. Large hats are of black Chantilly lace.

Fashion Plates.

A SMART SUIT FOR EARLY FALL.



2926—For this style, tricotine, serge, taffeta, velour, gabardine, or velvet 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 yard.

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Pattern 3152, cut in 4 Sizes: 6, 7, 10, and 12 years, is here depicted. Brown and blue plaid suiting with white pique for trimming, was employed in this instance. Gingham, percale, lawn, linen, taffeta, and serge are appropriate for this model. A 10 year size will require 3 1/2 yards of 36 inch material. The sleeve may be finished in wrist or elbow length.

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