

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

CHAPTER XI.  
HELD BY THE ENEMY.

"When everything is settled, as I fell sure it will be, and you also find yourself comfortably settled in a nice little flat, with a thousand a year, and no anxieties as to the future, I think you will agree with me that the risks, such as they are, were worth taking, and as they have to be taken—"

"Thank you, Lillas, that's quite enough," interrupted Miss Holroyd, as she stood with her hand on the knob of the door. "It is a pity that a woman like you should have been made so beautiful, and that the Fates, or whatever they are, forgot to put a soul in you. Still, that can't be helped now, I suppose, and so I will go and give Sir Arthur his medicine."

"Wicked! Wicked!" laughed Lillas softly to herself, as her aunt passed out and closed the door. "Yes, I suppose it is, in a certain sense. For instance, Mr. Kenneth Markham would think it very wicked indeed, but he has such absurdly virtuous ideas! Still, from my point of view, it is a matter of necessity, and what is necessary has to be done. If any trouble—serious trouble—arises from this, I wonder if I shall be able to persuade him that my case is such a just one that he will feel that, in the interests of justice, he is compelled to defend it. What a handsome fellow he is, and how brilliant! Ah, if I could only marry a man like that! Ah, what a very funny world it is!"

CHAPTER XII.  
AN EXCITED INVALID.

Punctually at eleven Lillas relieved the elderly nurse who was in attendance upon Sir Arthur during the night watches.

"You had better go and get your supper now, nurse, and arrange things for the night," she said, as she entered the big, cozily furnished room which had been selected as Arthur Eversley's death chamber. "You can come back in an hour. Miss Holroyd and myself will take charge until then."

The patient was lying in a big, luxuriously appointed bed, looking, as he was feeling, very ill. He had had a very bad relapse during the afternoon, which was due to the fact that during a half hour's absence of Miss Holroyd from the room he had noticed that she had forgotten to take away with her a bottle about half full of brandy. The medicine which he had been taking had increased, rather than reduced, the craving for alcohol, and the temptation was irresistible. By the time she had come back, the bottle was empty, and hidden behind a chest of drawers which stood across one corner of the room.

Curiously enough, but greatly to his satisfaction, she had not appeared to notice the absence of the bottle. Then had come an attempt at supper, then the other dose of the medicine given by Miss Holroyd, and now a raging thirst, and an absolute hunger of the whole nervous system for something—either stimulant or sedative, he didn't know which; he only knew that he must have one or the other, or both, or go mad.

"Lillas," he said, in a weak, wavering voice, as the door closed, "what the deuce is that stuff Mathews is giving me? I'm simply blazing with thirst, and I feel about half mad as

well. Just feel that hand. If you've never seen fever before, well there it is."

She stooped over the bed and looked into his burning eyes. Then she took the hand that he held out to her. The skin was like dry, heated parchment, and she could feel the muscles jerking and quivering under it; then his limbs stiffened out and the muscles contracted again convulsively, and a shudder went through his body that made the bed shake. His head rolled from side to side, and every now and then his eyes stared at her with an unwinking steadiness, which, in spite of her deadly purpose, made her afraid. It was a bad attack of recurrent malaria, complicated with strychnine and an overdose of brandy, and that is not a pleasant thing even for a callous person to look upon.

"You poor dear," she said, softly laying her hand on his forehead and holding his head still, as she leaned down and looked into his eyes. "I am afraid you have a rather bad attack. Are you sure that you haven't been persuading nurse to give you more than your allowance of brandy and soda. You know what the doctor told you. The only real danger to you is that dreadful drink."

"Drink!" he laughed, pulling himself up in bed with a convulsive movement. "Drink! Brandy and soda! By gad, Lillas, that's just what I want. You've hit it. Go and get one, like a good girl—a good, stiff one, and a long one, mixed by those pretty hands of yours. I've got a mouth like a chemist's shop, and a throat like half a mile of African desert. If I don't get a drink, I shall choke. Go on, there's a darling. Go and get me one."

"My dear Arthur, I can't. You know that it is absolutely against the doctor's orders," she replied, bending down and looking into his eyes. "Besides, you can't feel like that, unless—but, no, that can't be possible. You've—you've not been getting any drink, any brandy, have you, Arthur? Surely you haven't!"

His eyes turned up toward her, and he said, with the weak, halting tone of the dipsomaniac who wants to tell a lie well and does it badly:

"No, dear—darling, I mean. Drink, do you suppose I'd take that? No, not a drop. You told me not to, you know. I should hope you had more faith in me than that. No, I've given myself to you, as you know, to save me, and when you've saved me you are going to give yourself to me, eh? That's the bargain isn't it? Isn't it, old darling? Here, take hold of my hand, and tell me it is so, that I can feel sure of you. You'll excuse this sort of speech. We acquire it out in the East, or the West—where the deuce is it? Where was I last? What was it—India or Egypt? No, I think it was Africa. Oh, yes, I can tell you, Dora. Perhaps you don't remember that little talk we had on the balcony at Shepard's Hotel, Cairo, when I said that if I did ever happen to come into the family wealth you should share it. Don't you remember? No, no; I see, Dora, you've forgotten all about it. You women have no memories. And yet you know you said you would."

"Dora?"

"Yes, Dora. You're Dora, aren't you? You must be. Of course you are,

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and I am going to marry you as soon as I come into the title. You silly little fool, don't you understand? I'll make you Lady Eversley, with forty thousand a year. Can't you see what a gorgeous time you'd have? No, you don't? Just like you fools of women."

Lillas had almost jumped back from the bed when she heard herself called Dora, and in that moment there came the crisis of a life. She was still halting between purpose and principle until he uttered the name, but she was a woman, and a potential criminal and that decided her.

She went to the sideboard in the adjoining sitting room, and opened the cellaret at the right-hand side of it. She had to unlock it with the key which she carried on her chateleine, and as she did so Sir Arthur turned himself over in the bed and followed every motion that she made, with eyes not hungering, but thirsting, craving for what he believed was coming.

She took a bottle of brandy out of the cellaret, poured out a fairly liberal allowance, and said, as she looked around at him, with a smile which set him wondering whether she was really Lillas or the Dora who had temporarily bewitched him at Cairo four months ago:

"I'm afraid that I'm transgressing the doctor's orders just a little, because I don't think you ought to have quite as much as this at once. Still, he said that I could give you your medicine with it, and so I suppose it won't do you very much harm. I've got to put the medicine into the brandy, you know, so you won't taste it. It's just an aromatic sort of compound that takes away the effect of the alcohol. There—now, I think that's about right. Now would you like soda with it, or water?"

"Soda, Dora, darling," he replied, reaching his hand out of the bed. "Anything would be delicious from your dear hand; but, yes, I think I'd rather have soda, and not too much. Thanks, dearest, thanks; but do hurry up, please; I've got a most awful thirst on me."

She poured the dose of medicine into the tumbler containing the brandy, nearly filled it with soda water from the siphon, and took it to his bedside, her face white and her eyes black. His hand trembled as he took the glass from her, but he was able to drink what it held, and when he had

got it down and given her the glass, he lay down in bed again, and said, with a curious mixture of a gasp and a laugh:

"Ah, yes, yes, Dora, that was jolly good of you! Oh, I did want that. It's another man of me already. Yes, I'm better now. Yes, yes, a lot better. Good night, Dora. Don't bother any more about me now. Awfully good of you to have looked after me like this, but I shall be all right in the morning. Good night. Well, you might just as well give me one kiss before you go."

Still holding his hand, she leaned over and kissed him with cold, reluctant lips. Then she went into the sitting room and lay down in a long deck chair to await developments.

She had not very long to wait. In fact, she had hardly got her thoughts in train before she heard three shots from a revolver, punctuating screams of rage and fright in the bedroom.

(To be continued.)

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