The Case of Lady Broadstone

A THRILLING STORY OF LOVE, MONEY AND INTRIGUE.

By

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THE CASE OF LADY BROADSTONE.
SYNOPSIS TO END OF CHAPTER IV.

"Cast-iron John" Petherby, a multi-millionaire, forces his daughter, Eva, to marry Lord Broadstone, exiling her lover, Don Stuart. Lord Broadstone had been married in America under an alias, and left his wife for dead, having tried to poison her. His cousin, Gilbert Dorrison, heir to the title, discovers she is living. Meanwhile, she has a son, and has inherited wealth. She goes to England to search for her husband. Dorrison, who is on the steamer, tries to marry her for her money, but she knows his intention and cleverly humiliates him.

CHAPTER V.

DORRISON'S BLANK CARTRIDGE.

Gilbert Dorrison felt his defeat keenly. Never in his life before had he had to drain such a cup of humiliation, and the taste rankled and enraged him beyond measure.

The disappointment was bad enough. He had had the golden apple of Fortune in his very hands, only to have it torn from him with degradation and insult, and without even a faint hope of recovery.

But the disappointment was not by any means the worst. He had been so out-jugged that in his folly he had let the mask of his hypocrisy be snatched away. Had the skin been torn from his flesh, the pain and smart could not have been worse. All through the night he winced at the remembrance of Sadie's contemptuous glances and shrank under the lash of her bitter words.

His own stupidity in not having made inquiries about her wealth beforehand was like a sword in the flesh. There were a dozen ways in which he could have found out the truth, and he groaned as he thought how, with that easily gained knowledge, he could have answered her avowal of poverty with passionate declarations of unselfish love for herself, and have pressed her to marry him, wealthy or a pauper.

Instead of that he had let her see right into his inner nature. "There is one woman in London who knows you for the paltry scoundrel you are!"

The words bit like acid, for there is little misery more acute than that of a hypocrite in the hours which follow his first detection.

He was in want of money, it was true; but he could trust himself to get enough out of his cousin to smooth matters over.

He looked into his affairs that morning and not without some uneasiness saw that he must have some five thousand pounds to meet immediate needs. He would go down again to Broadstone Towers that day and get it from his cousin. A very silent turn of the screw ought to be enough to squeeze that sum out of him, although he was by no means willing to part with money.

Eva had always shrunk from the task of entertaining people, and now pleaded her father's death as a reason for seeing no one; and she passed most of her time alone or with Jack when he was at the Towers.

She saw very little of her husband. He was often absent from Broadstone; and, when there, spent most of his days shooting or riding, and passed the evenings in his own rooms, where he could tipple at his ease.

She was glad to see Dorrison. Jack liked him, and she took her cue from him. Her life of subjection to her father had made it difficult for her to form any independent opinions or to take the initiative herself. Her nature was one which required some stronger will to rely upon and cling to.

She found Dorrison when she went down to dinner and welcomed him sweetly.

"A pleasant surprise, Mr. Dorrison. I am glad to see you."

"Didn't Bertram tell you I was coming? I wired him."

"I have not seen him to-day. But he never tells me anything. You see, it wasn't necessary for me to know, I mean," she added, with a faint and rather sad smile. "You are always welcome and we don't count you as a guest. Your rooms are always ready."

"That's very pleasant of you, Eva. But if I had known I would have wired you as well as Bertram. You have the knack of always saying pleasant things, you know."

"Have I?" she replied, quite simply. "But I really mean I am glad to see you. Jack's coming in a day or two, and he'll be glad to see you, too."

"How your face brightens when you speak of him, Eva."

"He's all I have in the world to—I mean we have always loved each other so much. You see, in the old days at Petherby I was so dependent on him for heaps of things."

"I understand," he replied, meaningly.

"Don't tell Bertram I said anything like that. But I——" She faltered and stopped. Then with another wistful smile she added: "I am afraid I am always saying things I ought not to, except to Jack, of course; but he understands."

"I hope I understand too, Eva. But I wish with all my heart that you were happier. You deserve it; on my soul, you do."

Eva tried to restrain a sigh, and to cover it with a smile. "I don't know that I am unhappy, except that I have one little bother now. I am losing my maid, and she has been such a companion that I shall miss her. One gets so used to people about one. I know I'm very selfish."

"I wish I could think that was your only trouble," declared Dorrison earnestly, and with a steady look that somewhat disconcerted her.

Before she could reply Lord Broadstone entered. He took no notice of Eva, who shrank away to the window. "Hullo, you here already, Gilbert?" he said.

"They told me you were out when I arrived. Didn't they tell you I was here?"

"I only came in in time to scramble into my things. Dinner's ready. Come on. For once I declare I am hungry," and he went off leaving Dorrison to give his arm to Eva and follow.

Even the pretense of common courtesy had been abandoned by him.

The dinner was a dull affair. His lordship ate much and drank more, and his only remarks to his wife were made when he grumbled at something on the table. Dorrison tried to make conversation with Eva but she was overweighted by the presence of her husband; so that even Dorrison, who could always talk readily, found himself a little at a loss.

When the wine had had some effect, Broadstone spoke a little to his wife. "Been out to-day?" he asked abruptly.

"I went for a drive this afternoon, Bertram," she replied like a child to an elder.

"You look peaky. Want more air. Too much indoors. I wish you'd teach her golf, Gilbert."

"I should be delighted. Where are the links?"

"Within motoring distance. Do you no end of good," he added to Eva.

"Jack's coming in a day or so, Bertram. I shall get out more then. It's so lonely getting about by oneself."

"Well, it's your own fault. You won't see anybody. But Jack'll wake you up a bit, I hope. I'm glad he's coming."

Eva smiled. Any kind reference to her brother pleased her. "I hope he'll be here to-morrow or the day after," she said as she was leaving the room.

He got up and opened the door for her—an unusual act of attention—and said with a smile: "Try to buck up a bit, Eva." But as soon as she had left the room he shrugged his shoulders and grimaced as he resumed his seat.

"She doesn't seem very happy," Bertram," said Dorrison.

"She's a doll; that's all. And one isn't in the mood always to be playing with dolls," he returned impatiently. "Gets on one's nerves. Perhaps the cub will do her good."

"I like Jack," declared Dorrison.

"All right. I shan't be jealous," sneered Broadstone. "But what brings you back so soon? I was glad to get your wire. How's the widow?"

"It's off, I made an ass of myself, to tell the truth." He could already force himself to speak lightly of it. "I cried off. It turns out she hasn't really any money, so I beat a diplomatic retreat."

"Trust you for diplomacy. But what a sell, eh?"

"Oh, I don't know. I wanted the money; but I'll be hanged if I wanted a wife."

"Comes to that, we all want money, by Jove." Broadstone had a strong suspicion of Dorrison's object and meant to forestall him.

"Except you, you mean."

"My dear fellow, I'm as poor as a rat. Think of my throwing myself on the parish to get some pocket money." A little joke at which he laughed.

"But now the old man's dead you ought to be on velvet."

"Velvet? Cotton-waste's more like it. The Towers are mortgaged up to the hilt, and every pound I spend I have to go to my wife for. If you'd married the widow, you'd soon have known what that meant. Velvet!" and he laughed again.

"Well, the truth is I want some money very badly; and what's more, I must get it from somewhere."

"Poor old Gilbert! I was going to ask you if you could manage without that thousand a year for a time. Of course, legally your not entitled to it, now that I'm married; but I wanted to do the square thing by you."

"Legally?" That's the first time I've heard you use that word."

"Well, old chap, you aren't, are you. But I don't want to bother."

"If it comes to 'legally,' what about your marriage?"

Lord Broadstone shook his head and grinned. "That cock won't fight, old chap. You hinted something about that the other day when you were down, and I've been thinking it over. You see, it's this way. I'm either married to Eva—or to somebody else; and in either case you'd be out of it."

Dorrison frowned. "Well, I want £5,000," he said, firmly. "And there'll be trouble if I don't get it."

"Trouble for you, you mean. I'm sorry for you, old man."

"I said trouble. I didn't say for whom."

"If I hadn't been a fool with old Petherby, I could have done it. When he asked what my debts were I was idiot enough to name half the amount. I could as easily have got a hundred thousand out of him as fifty. As it is, I've had to get as much as I could out of Eva. Now her trustees are kicking and golden eggs are scarce."

"I must have the money, Bertram," repeated Dorrison. "That's what I've come down for."

"Then you'd better ask my wife for it. That's all I can suggest."

"Which one?" asked Dorrison, sharply and nastily.

But his lordship only shook his head and chuckled. "You don't want to quarrel, old man, do you? That won't help either of us. I'd let you have the money if I had it, but I haven't. I want twice as much myself, but I haven't as many shillings. I'm kicking my heels in this infernally dull hole, only because I can't afford to live anywhere else till after the next rent audit day."

"You can raise it somewhere."

"My dear fellow, my bankers wouldn't lend me a brass farthing on my signature alone. I'm overdrawn already pretty heavily."

"Get your wife, then."

"Which one?" mocked Broadstone; and then added seriously: "You haven't got the hang of this thing, Gilbert. If you can upset this marriage, do it. I'll be glad enough, on my oath. I don't think Eva would mind. I'm sick of the life. Now old Petherby's gone no one would care."

Dorrison smoked for a while in frowning silence.

"Look here Gilbert," continued his cousin, "think of some way in which I can help you, and I'll do it. But to ask me for ready money is no more good than to throw a fly for a trout in a water-butt."

Dorrison frowned again this time very sourly.

"You call it upsetting the marriage, but for you it is more than that—it's bigamy."

"Don't talk rot, Gilbert. If my first wife is alive I didn't know it when I married Eva; and I don't believe it now."

"But I warned you."

"Oh, no, indeed you didn't. You said something afterwards; but it was too late then, of course."

"Do you mean to deny that I wrote and warned you?"

"That's about the size of it, old chap. You've been dreaming. I had no such warning from you."

"Do you deny that Gardner brought you a letter?"

"Not a bit. That was to say you couldn't get down in time for the ceremony, or something equally trifling. I forget."

The eyes of both men met in a long steady stare.

Then Dorrison said: "You've been seeing some infernal lawyer?"

Lord Broadstone winked. "You ought to know by this time, Gilbert, that a blank cartridge fills no game bag. And now let's talk about something else."

He mixed himself another whisky and soda and lit a fresh cigar, chuckling to himself at Dorrison's discomfiture and anger.

CHAPTER VI.

SINISTER THOUGHTS.

Jack Retherby had one of those bright, open-hearted, generous natures which spread sunshine all around. Everybody had a good word for him; and the instant he entered the Towers the place seemed to catch the infection of his winning smile and to ring with the echo of his cheery voice.

There was only one person with whom he could not be friendly—Broadstone himself. The latter professed to Eva that he liked her brother; but Jack made no secret of his dislike for his lordship; and the two nearly came to quarrelling the morning after Jack's arrival.

Jack in his impetuous way had walked into Broadstone's room and asked: "How is it that Eva is looking so troubled, Lord Broadstone?"

"You had better ask Dr. Bradford, Jack. He looks after her."

"He doesn't give medicine for spirits. The trouble's there. And they're your lookout. She is downright miserable.

"Hang me if I know the reason. She has everything a woman can want. I can't do anything."

"You leave her so much alone for one thing. She's hipped to death."

"Has she been saving up her complaints for the head of the family?" asked Broadstone, with a sneer.

"You needn't sneer at me because I'm only seventeen. She has no other friends or relatives except me; and it's my place to speak to you."

"Look here, my boy; go away and grow a little, and when you're a bit older and understand something about women, come and quarrel with me. Your sister can do exactly what she likes, when she likes, and how she likes; and why she isn't happy I don't know, unless she's grizzling over—well, you know pretty well what I mean. But I can't help that, I suppose."

"He'd have made her much happier than she is now," replied Jack, losing his temper. "I wish I were older; I'd take her away for a bit."

"I wish you were, Jack. Then you'd see what rubbish your talking. You mean well enough but you want tact. Don't bother me any more about it. We can't change things."

Jack went off feeling very angry at this evident truth, and found Eva in the morning-room looking so thoughtful and troubled that his heart ached for her. He stood watching her for a moment before she saw him. Then she jumped up with a smile.

"Sit down again, girlie. I want to talk with you."

"What now, Jack?"

"Look here—you're not happy. What's the matter with you?"

"Not happy when you come? Jack, how ridiculous!"

"Is Broadstone unkind to you?"

"No, Jack. Why?"

"I caught you just now off your guard and you looked so wretched I'm sure there's something the matter. Tell me."

"There's nothing to tell, dear. I'm alone a great deal; but—I suppose it's an awful thing to say—I'd rather be alone than with—oh, don't make me speak about it."

"I know how it hurts to keep things to one's self. I wish I could always be here."

"That's just it. I do miss someone to talk to."

"But there must be heaps of people who would be glad enough to be your friends, Eva. Can't you find someone?"

She smiled. "You know what a nervous little silly I am. I can't make any friends at all; I often wish I could;" and she sighed.

"The governor never ought to have made you marry Broadstone," he burst out impetuously. "It's beastly shame."

"Don't Jack; it hurts."

"If I'd been at home it wouldn't have happened. We'd have cut away last and gone to America. I wish we had."

Eva made no reply except to sigh again, more heavily than before.

"I heard from old Don the other day, Eva," he said after a pause.

"Did you? I hope he's doing well."

He left Montana sometime ago and went to Mexico. He said he was doing all right."

"Does he—does he know I'm married?"

"I wrote and told him all about it."

"That was best, of course," she said, keeping her eyes on her lap.

"Is that what worries you, Eva?" She kept her face down and did not answer. "Eva, you can trust me. And you can't help it if it is."

The tears were in her eyes and she was trying to gulp down the sobs. "I do try not to think of him, Jack, but—oh, I wish sometimes that I were dead;" and the tears gained the mastery and she laid her head on his arm and broke down. "Father told Bertram all about it, Jack," she said between her sobs, "and he often sneers about it when he's had a lot of wine."

"He's a brute," said Jack curtly.

"No, Jack, not that. I don't suppose he knows how it hurts; and often he's as kind as any man could be."

"When he wants something, I suppose, he growled.

"Never mind, Jack," said Eva presently," wiping away the tears. "We can't alter it. I have to bear it all my life; and I try to make the best of it. But of course it was a horrible mistake, and, after all, it must be as bad for Bertram as for me. I ought not to think of Don; and it serves me right."

"Rot" declared Jack, laconically. "I wish, you'd stand up to him a bit more. He only married you for your coin, and you've got the whip hand there."

"Don't Jack. I'm only too glad to do whatever I can for the sake of peace."

At that moment Dorrison strolled into the room. "Hullo, you two; having a little family conference? Don't let me be in the way."

But Jack was glad of the interruption. He had stirred a trouble of which he could not see any solution. He liked Dorrison, moreover. "Don't go, Mr. Dorrison. I was only trying to cheer Eva up a bit."

"You should be here more, boy. That would do it. Your the best medicine for her. Isn't that so, Eva?"

Her answer was a smile and a glance at her brother.

"I haven't managed to cheer her up much this morning," said Jack, a little dismally.

"What you should do, Jack, is to stay here awhile and look round to find your sister a friend or two. She's hipped in this big house alone. She'll be worse than ever now, because she's losing her maid, who has been some sort of a companion."

"I should think Broadstone should find her a friend," said Jack.

Bertram doesn't quite understand Eva, I fancy. He told me he brought Miss Hamyl here for that very purpose.

Eva's face clouded. "I don't like Gertrude Hamyl," she said quickly.

"I'm not very much surprised at that," replied Dorrison dryly. He managed to imply a great deal by his tone, and Jack noticed it. Eva flushed and looked down; and then Dorrison added: "She and her mother are coming here on a visit, I understand."

Eva rose. "Oh, don't let us waste the morning talking about Gertrude Hamyl," she cried. "We have to go for our ride, Jack. I'll go and put my habit on."

"What did you mean about that Hamyl girl, Mr. Dorrison?" asked Jack, when they were alone.

"Nothing, my boy," was the reply, given in a tone that implied much.

"I have never seen her."

"You haven't missed much. What Bertram can see in her, I can't for the life of me understand. That's all."

Jack frowned. "Do you mean—"

"I don't mean anything, Jack. But it's an infernal shame. That's all." He did mean a great deal. He had been thinking over that conversation with Broadstone, and had come to the conclusion that it would be a very good stroke indeed for him if he could set Bertram and his wife at loggerheads and perhaps separate them altogether. It might pay him well to stand by Eva's side in the case of a family quarrel. He would at least be on the side of the moneybags. And he knew enough about Broadstone's relations with Miss Hamyl to make capital out of it at need. But he would not let Jack draw him into saying anything more just then; so he rose and asked if he might go with the two for the morning's ride, and then went off to get ready.

Another thought occurred to him in regard to separating husband and wife, and while he and Jack were waiting for Eva he began to sound Jack.

"By the way, did you ever hear any more of that old friend of yours, Don Stuart, who went out to Montana? When I was out there I tried to find him. Thought perhaps he'd be able to put me up to some good things there."

He left Montana and went somewhere in Mexico," said Jack, unsuspiciously.

"Wise chap. Montana's about played out except for the syndicates. No chance of his coming home, I suppose?" he asked, casually.

"I hope he won't," said Jack, gloomily.

"Why not?"

"Don't you know?". The question was quite ingenuously put.

"Oh, you mean about your sister? That's all over long since, of course; but perhaps it would be as well. Ah, here's Eva."

Dorrison liked the idea the more he considered it. If Don Stuart could be brought home he might help materially to separate Broadstone and Eva. Her low spirits, pale looks, melancholy, and yearning for a companion, all suggested that she had by no means forgotten her old lover. If Broadstone were disposed to set him at defiance, he was not inclined to take it meekly; and his nimble wits were soon busy with fresh schemes, in which he saw himself as Eva's champion and defender, a position that might be made both comfortable and profitable. During the ride an incident occurred that gave a fresh and even more sinister direction to his thought. They were crossing some fields, and Dorrison, who was riding a steady old hunter, put his horse at a gate and cleared it. Jack followed, but his horse refused, and he was thrown. He was up again in a moment with a laugh.

"My million wasn't much good to me then, Mr. Dorrison," said Jack. They had just been speaking of his being a millionaire. "If the brute had broken my neck it would have been Eva's instead of mine."

"Dont Jack," cried Eva, nervously.

Dont talk nonsense, boy," said Dorrison, sharply. "You only frighten your sister. And get a firmer seat before you try another five-barred gate."

"I'm going over this one anyhow," was the quick reply; and stung by the taunt and heedless of Eva's protests, Jack made the jump after three attempts.

Dorrison watched the scene with a calculating, cynical smile. If Jack has broken his neck, Eva would have been entirely alone. "Jack," he said, as they rode off, "I like your pluck; but if you do dare-devil things like that, I sha'n't come out with you again."

"I wish your weren't so venturesome, Jack," agreed Eva; but the lad only laughed gally.

"I was determined not to be beaten," he declared.

That night when Broadstone and Dorrison were smoking together alone, the latter spoke of the incident in a way that showed the significant course his thoughts had taken in regard to it.

"Jack had a nasty spill out with me to-day," he said. He described the affair, and added: "He has plenty of grit, that boy."

"I wish he'd broken his neck," was the reply.

"Thats kind of you. Why?"

"About a million and a half reasons, and each of 'em worth twenty shillings."

Dorrison paused, flicked the ash off his cigar, and took a pull at his whiskey and soda. Then he said very slowly: "There are other accidents, you know, Bertram."

"He's too lucky to meet with 'em—the interfering young cub."

"Luck helps those who help themselves. There are accidents and—accidents, you know."

"What do you mean?"

"Has Eva made a will?"

"What the devil are you driving at?"

"She'd have Jack's money if—an accident did happen."

"I never thought of that. By gad, I'll see to it."

There was another pause.

"I should. He's very fond of sailing on the big lake, and it's—it's very dangerous. I've been out with him more than once, and I know!"

Broadstone turned and stared at his cousin and their eyes met. After a pause Broadstone said: "I think you've got a heap of the devil in you, Gilbert."

"I didn't say anything."

"But you hinted a heap."

"Rot! Of course, when I'm with him in the boat, it's all safe enough because I look after myself. But—it might happen, even then. And if you had that million and a half of his, you could——"

"About £20,000 would set me straight and put me well on my feet again."

"I don't pretend to know what your driving at, Gilbert. But, of course, if I had another million or so, I could spare you £20,000 easily.

But they spoke very little for the rest of the evening; and Lord Broadstone went to bed more drunk than usual.

CHAPTER VII.

DON STUART COMES HOME.

The days which followed Sadie's interview with Dorrison were very busy ones for her. She had been profoundly moved by the knowledge that her husband was alive, but her excitement was due less to the fact itself than to the dramatic manner in which the fact had been thrust upon her.

She had always calculated upon the possibility that he might be alive, but had reckoned that, if she found him, he would be what he had always seen—a drunken, broken-down, dissolute shack.

That a man of Dorrison's position and family should know him, however; that he should be living a life of ease and have married a wealthy woman; and that Sadie herself of all the world should have been asked to personate his first wife—herself—in order to put blackmail into the pockets of this smooth-tongued, well-dressed scamp, filled Sadie with amazement. And her amazement was not one whit greater than her anger and resentment.

His conduct to her in the past had been infamous in the extreme. In return for her love and work and care, he had treated her with neglect, lies, callous selfishness and harshness, culminating in that act of supreme treachery by which he had sought to use her illness—illness caused by her ceaseless efforts of his behalf—to attempt to poison her.

That despite all this he should have prospered seemed to her nothing less than a colossal injustice, and roused her anger to a white heat.

His offences were unforgivable and by her unforgiven. She would find and punish him. As he had shown her no mercy in the past, so she would show none to him now. her not Southern blood boiled as she nursed her anger in the lap of remembrance, and in the first hours that followed the discovery she did little else but think and scheme and dream of revenge.

Of the woman whom he had married, Sadie scarcely thought, except contemptuously. She had been fool enough to be beguiled by him and must pay the price of her folly. He had always had a winning way with women—she knew that to her bitter, bitter cost; and if she herself had suffered, others must look to themselves.

It was a hard philosophy; but Sadie was a woman—and a very angry one, too, when that resolve was first formed.

She had long ceased to have any feeling for her husband except loathing. She would have been glad to have heard of his death any time during the past five years. She had been all-willing to let him believe her dead. Still, he was the father of her child; she was his wife; and no other woman had a right to that place. And that another had taken it enraged and embittered the wife against that interloper. There are many singular eddies in the maelstrom of a woman's anger.

The task of finding her husband would now be rendered comparatively easy, she thought, on account of the new clue afforded by the recent marriage. A few inquiries enabled her to learn that a record of all marriages was kept at Somerset House, and that it was open to her to search there.

But the search failed to help her. She was looking for the marriage of Bert Hunter; and although she read that of the marriage of Bertram Hunter Dorrison, Baron Broadstone, to Evangeline Petherby, she had not a suspicion of the truth.

She returned to the hotel weary and irritable, and found awaiting her a telegram which had been sent on from the American Exchange.

She smiled as she opened and read that it was from Don Stuart, the confidential agent of a Mr. Mostyn, a Mexican mine owner and speculator, who had bought some of her late uncle's mining properties.

(To be Continued)