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## The Snake Scotched —AND— Justice Done.

CHAPTER V.  
(Continued.)

"You mean your father?" said Veronica, fighting against the interest in the story.

"No, I don't," he said. "I shall put on a blue upright now; some clouds have come over the sky, and a blue upright will tell. No, I don't; I never knew my father. He died before I was born. I meant my mother's second husband." His lips tightened, and he frowned as he bent over a fly. "I never knew him. He deserted my mother before I can remember. I don't know why I tell you this. Ah, yes! You wanted to know why I hadn't a fuller character. My mother and I lived alone. When I was old enough I began to work for her. We were poor and the struggle for existence was hard; but I did my best. I got some work at the mines. But before that I had been a sheep-boy, cattle-boy, anything that turned up. I earned enough for us both. I was doing well. Then—he bent more closely over the fly, so that Veronica could not see his face—"then she died."

There was a pause. It seemed to Veronica that she was sharing the man's grief. She fought against the sympathy; but it was of no use. And half unconsciously she murmured: "She died."

"Yes; I ought to have been glad. I know that now, but I was sorry, for—I loved her. And after she had gone I took to wandering. I don't think I cared very much what became of me. I got some work on some mines again. One day, as we were sitting round the camp-fire, I heard a man, a tender-foot, a new-comer, talk about England. I was English. The man's tight

words stirred in me the desire to see the old country. I had saved some money—enough to pay my passage—and I started here and then. When I got to England I tried to get some work in London. A wonder place London! A heaven for the rich, a hades for the poor! I worked at the docks. I am strong—they said I was the strongest man there—but they didn't pay me more than the others, by the way."

Veronica glanced sideways at his muscular frame, at the handsome face with its expression of far-away reverie. Despite the difference between them she was intensely interested. She could not only picture the man's experience, but imagine his moods.

"I found the work easy enough, but the surroundings, the atmosphere, the squalor— Ah, well, I longed for the open air, the country. One day I took the train at haphazard and reached Halsey. The rest I think you know. That's why I haven't proper testimonials. Had it not been for you, for the fox terrier and her pup, I should still have been wandering about the world. As it is, I have settled down here in one of the loveliest places God ever created. And I am happy; thanks to you."

Veronica drew a long breath. She had been lost in the man's story; her vivid imagination had easily filled in all the blanks. But yet there was a mystery, something unexplained something puzzling. According to his own account, he was nothing better than an ordinary workman, a parish one of those who gain their livelihood by the work of their hands, a humal being immeasurably beneath her. And yet he spoke and moved with the grace and ease which she had always thought belonged to the higher class to her equals. She looked before her with her brows bent thoughtfully, pondering over the puzzle. Was it because there was more equality in the land from which he had come, was it because—Her interest in him and his story made her angry and impatient with herself.

"Oh, well," she said, with affected indifference, "you are all right now. Your situation is secure. You may stay here until—"

"Until I grow restless, he said, with a smile.

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Veronica rose proudly, coldly. "Good morning," she said. He raised his cap. "Will you not come down and try the fish again, Miss Gresham?" he said. "You would throw the fly very well if you stuck to it for a while. Burchett says that I am to send some trout up to the house every day. Won't you come down sometimes, say to-morrow, about this time? The weather is changing. We shall have it cloudy to-morrow, and you shall catch as many trout as you like."

Veronica stood with her face turned away from him. She wanted to say "No," and to say it indifferently, coldly, with the mistress's air and tone. But she could not. In spite of herself, of her pride of birth and station, she said:

"I will come to-morrow. At this time. Be here, please." He raised his cap again. "I will be here," he said, gravely.

CHAPTER VI.

Veronica, as she went back to the Court, felt displeased with herself. Now that she was away from the—well, yes, almost momentary—influence of Ralph Farrington, she was able to appreciate his strange tone and manner of equality; only once or twice had he addressed her by her name. And though she had not noticed his omission of the usual mark of respect at the time and had tried to feel offended, she had not succeeded when she had recovered from her excitement over the fishing she had put on all the hauteur of which she was capable—and it was not a little—but she remembered with a mixture of irritation and amusement it did not appear to have had much effect upon him; indeed, once she had caught the shadow of a smile in his eyes, as if he had found something humorous in the pride expressed by voice and manner.

She thought of his story, of the simplicity and restraint with which he had spoken of his mother, and as she recalled his downcast face her heart softened towards him.

As a matter of fact, Miss Veronica of Lynne Court found her experiences of the morning cropping up in her mind in a rather inconvenient fashion throughout the day.

In the afternoon she made a call on the Saintsburys at the Grange. Young Lord Vincent, the eldest son and heir of the house, and one of her most ardent admirers, happened to be at home. He was a good-looking young fellow, with a fair, almost girlish face, and he spoke with a decided lisp added to his Oxford drawl. Hitherto he and his devotion had only amused Veronica, but this afternoon as he hovered about his mother's tea-table, uttering rapid commonplace, with his eyeglasses screwed up in his eye, she felt horrified and impatient of him. She would have been startled, if she had been conscious that she was comparing him with Ralph Farrington, the gamekeeper; but she was so comparing him, and to Lord Vincent's disadvantage.

That night, as she played ecarte with the earl, she made so many mistakes that the old man eyed her with a cold surprise.

"I'm afraid the game bores you, Veronica," he said. "Shall we stop—at any rate until you have done thinking of something else?"

His cynical speeches and comments did not usually affect her, but to-night the colour mounted to her face, and she said, hastily—she who generally spoke so slowly and serenely: "No, no! We will play another game, Lord Lynborough!"

She was half ashamed, half angry at the mulish way in which her mind would wander to the man and the simple incidents of the morning, and she went to bed and to sleep in anything but a good temper. But, to her annoyance, when she awoke in the morning, the fact that she had promised to meet Ralph Farrington was the first thing to spring upon her.

"I will not go," she said. But she looked out of the window wistfully; for, as Ralph had said, the sky was cloudy, and it was, no doubt, a perfect day for fishing. "All the same, I will not go!" she said. "The man is too—too familiar. No, no! That is not fair; he would have been offensive if he had been familiar, and there was nothing, absolutely nothing one could resent. That is the worst of it. No, I won't go. It's fine sport; I don't know when I had been so interested—I am so often bored!—so—so amused. But I won't go!" she wound up firmly, but reluctantly.

She kept to her resolution; and felt like a martyr to the tyrant Boredom all day. She was almost glad that Talbot Denby was coming, for though she did not like him—much, his way was an interesting personality, and he would keep her from this foolish and almost insane thinking of Ralph Farrington.

While she was dressing—and she told her maid to choose one of her best frocks—she heard the carriage which had been sent to meet Talbot drive up to the great entrance; and when she went down to the drawing-room she found him standing with his back to the fire—for he inherited the earl's chilliness and was always more or less cold. He was staring at the carpet when she entered, and he started slightly and his lids rose with faint



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surprise as she swept into the room; for since his last visit at the Court, Veronica's girlish prettiness had developed into a loveliness that, though still full of charm of girlhood, suggested the imperial splendour of the woman. Hitherto he had regarded her as just a dependent, a kind of companion and housekeeper, though a relative; to-night he recognized that this superbly dressed, this graceful and exquisitely beautiful young creature was a woman to be reckoned with.

His lips took the curve which was meant for a smile, and his black eyes flashed under their white lids as he came forward and bowed over her hand. He noticed the diamonds glittering on her taper fingers and at her wrist, the costly string of pearls around her neck, and his old circling the white and slender neck; jewels the earl had given her, and, one of affable condescension was exchanged for one of friendly admiration, not unmixing with respect.

(To be continued.)

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