

The Snake Scotched AND Justice Done.

CHAPTER XI.
(Continued.)

"Lame!" He was shocked at so serious a word in connection with the lady of the Court. "Oh, no, my dear young lady! It depends upon yourself. Rest—rest is the most efficacious cure for a sprain. I will come again this evening and see how you are getting on. Now mind, I beg of you: rest—perfect rest!"

"That young fellow has saved Miss Gresham a week in bed at least," he said to the earl, as they went downstairs. "If he had allowed the boot to remain on, or had let her use the foot, the inflammation would have been more serious. Who do you say he is? I don't remember the name."

"Humph!" responded the earl. "A new keeper. A good-looking young fellow, who is a kind of favorite with Miss Gresham. You are sure there is nothing more than a sprain? You will look in this evening without failure."

Veronica got rid of Goodwin as soon as she could, and closing her eyes, leaned back and recalled the incidents of the morning. It was not only her foot that was burning; she was burning all over with a sensation that was not far removed from shame and self-reproach.

She had permitted Ralph Farrington to carry her—he had held her in his arms and twice that morning!—but, worse, she has—there was no use in endeavouring to stifle or dodge her accusing conscience—hobnobbed with him—there was no other word for it—as if he had been her equal; and, still worse, she had used all her feminine artifices to win his regard, to ensnare his admiration!

In the moments of her physical weakness, under the strain of her pain and the influence of her gratitude, the meaning of the course she was pursuing had not been realized by her; but now—now she was away from him, she realized it fully, and it sent hot waves of blood through her veins.

She confessed to herself that she had not felt affronted, indignant when he had put his arms round her; that she had been conscious of a sense of pleasure in his society; that the sound of his voice was like music in her ears, and never more pleasant than when he had faltered under the influence of her eyes, her smile, that she had not been anxious for the carriage to arrive, was, indeed, almost sorry, notwithstanding the pain, when it did come; and that she had tempted, invited, almost forced him to take her in his arms again.

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Fanny Mason! Yes, that describes my conduct! I took advantage of my position, of his helplessness and chivalry, and made him admire me, and—Oh, I'm not fit to live: here at Lynne Court, at any rate, unless as a housemaid. Yes, that is my proper place, for I behaved just like one! Perhaps if I'd been a housemaid he would have responded; for I invited him, I did, I did, I did? And—should I have been angry if he had presumed—Oh, I am raving mad! I've been thinking of him ever since he crossed my path. I wish the man would go. Yes; I must get Lord Lynborough to send him away!"

Her cheeks were still burning when Goodwin came in on tiptoe.

"For goodness sake don't creep about as if I were dying!" remonstrated Veronica, with novel sharpness.

"I beg your pardon, miss!" said poor Goodwin, still furred and emotional. "It's Fanny Mason. She came this morning—"

"Oh, let her come in!" said Veronica. The mention of the appearance of Fanny acted like a cold douche, and brought her back to her senses.

Fanny came in, all respectful concern and anxiety.

"Oh, miss, it's so kind of you to see me!" she said, hurriedly; "and I do hope it's nothing serious. I met Mr. Ralph just now, and he said it was a bad sprain, he was afeared. How fortunate he should have been on the spot! But there, I told him last night that he was a lucky young man!"

"Last night!" said Veronica, rather coldly.

"Yes, miss; he looked in with the fish you so kindly sent us, and stopped and had a bit of supper. Mother is always so pleased when he drops in, he's so pleasant and friendly and nice; so different to the other keepers and men on the estate. He seemed quite anxious about you, miss, when I met him just now; and he said as how you were so brave, and made light of the hurt, though he knew it must have pained you terrible—"

"Ah, yes, yes, I daresay," said Veronica, breaking in upon the glib and fluent words, every one of which seemed to jar upon her inexplicably.

"There's a dress I put aside for you, Fanny. Goodwin has it; it's to slight for her. I am glad," stemming Fanny's torrent of gratitude, "I am glad Ralph Farrington comes and sees you. He must feel lonely sometimes. And it's very nice of you to be kind to him. Good-bye. I hope the dress will not want much altering; it won't, I think for you and I are about the same size."

"And they call you proud, miss!" broke, apparently involuntarily, from Fanny's lips.

Veronica turned away her face, suddenly scarlet.

"Proud!" She laughed bitterly. "Oh, that's a mistake, Fanny, isn't it? Good-bye!"

She lay for hours on the sofa, trying not to think of Ralph, or, if she must think of him, trying to couple him in her thoughts with Fanny Mason; but at last she could bear the silence and solitude of the room no longer, and insisted upon being carried down stairs and onto the terrace.

But, alas, it was the very worst thing she could have done if she wanted to escape from thinking of Ralph, for she had not been reclining in the deck-chair many minutes before the earl came out, leaning upon his stick, and looking down at her considerably.

"The young fellow has brought up your boot and wants to know how you are, Veronica."

She made a peevish little movement with the shoulder nearest him.

"Oh, well! Tell him I am all right," she said. "What on earth was the use of bringing the boot! It is of no use!"

The earl was a just man though proud and stern.

"He did right to bring it," he said, laconically. "I'll thank him and send him away."

"Yes—but please don't offer him money," said Veronica.

The earl smiled grimly.

"If you can't trust to my discretion, you'd better thank him yourself. Send Farrington here," he said to the footman in attendance.

Veronica opened her lips to stop him, but with a sense of helplessness, turning over on his side, and lay with her cheek in her hand, fighting to keep the colour from her face.

She did not raise her eyes as she



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The earl frowned, and a spot of red came into his bloodless cheeks.

"Poachers? Where are they? I thought there were none on the estate."

"Well, there are none, or only one or two," said Ralph, quite unembarrassed now that the conversation had shifted on to professional grounds; "and we know who they are; but there are some strangers who come from the neighboring estates, and from London, even. They put up at the Dog and Owl; it's a nest of them."

The Dog and Owl was a low-browed, evil little pub on the high-road just off the Lynne lands.

(To be continued.)

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