

The Snake Scotched Justice Done.

CHAPTER XXIV.
(Continued)

He looked at her dress—the old serge was beginning to show signs of wear. She understood the look of course.

"And I wouldn't go back to that life of dependence if I could, Ralph. Ah, if you knew how happy I am—now I have got you back! But I will try and how you, dear! I'll bring my work and sit beside you, and talk to you, and sometimes—" She kissed him instead of finishing.

"Work?" he said, ruefully. "You work?" Oh, Veronica!

"And, oh, Ralph, why not! You forget that I once worked for my living; and it was a better, more dignified way of living than adwading about Lynne Court. Put, oh, how I have talked! You'll be bad and the doctor will turn me out and say that I'm not fit for a nurse."

"You nursed me!"
"I and Martha Ludlow: she's—she's a brick, if you like! You'll see her when she comes from the factory!"

"The factory!"
"And why not, sir? You think the proud Miss Gresham is to high and mighty to have a girl at a factory for a friend? The proud Miss Gresham has learnt common sense, dearest. Besides, Martha is a friend anyone might be proud of. And now, dear, I want to tell you about Mr. Saintsbury."

"Saintsbury? That is the name of the people at the Hall?" he said, wonderingly.

Veronica nodded.
"Yes; he is one of them. He is Ada's father. He has been abroad a great deal—in Australia—everywhere. They call him the 'black sheep' of the family, because he went out to earn his own living and has not been very successful, I suppose."

"It's a small world," remarked Ralph. "One of the Saintsburys Ada's father!"
"Yes; and Ralph, can you guess—but of course you can!—how grateful he is to you? You saved his only child, that dear little soul—of whom, by the way, I am a little wee bit jealous, sir; for it's plain you have won Miss Ada's heart. Ah as if anyone could help loving my Ralph!"

Another pause, filled in by the mute but more eloquent language of the lips.

"And Mr. Saintsbury has been thinking of you, our future—"

Ralph sighed penitently.
"Mine's of no great consequence, Veronica," he said. "Yours should be at Lynne Court!"

She laughed and shook her head.

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"So it would be if you were there; for it will be wherever you are, Ralph. Don't sigh sir; that is ungrateful. And now you must rest. Why, your hand is hot, and your poor face flushed. You must close your eyes and not open them for time. If you will promise to be good—very good—I will close them for you."

And she did so in a way that the Angel of Sleep herself might have envied.

When the famous doctor came he stared with a mixture of surprise and satisfaction.
"You have the strength and the frame of a Hercules, my young friend," he said. "No one man in a thousand would have pulled round so quickly; not one in a hundred would have been alive."

"Perhaps not one in a million would have so much to live for, Sir Thomas," remarked Ralph, with a grave smile.

"Humph!" said Sir Thomas, in his curt way. "That's it, is it? Well, you will have a good nurse for a wife, as well as one of the most beautiful girls I have ever seen." Sir Thomas was a keen admirer of the fair sex. "If that's what you've got to live for, I'm not surprised at your making a fight for it. I'm told that you are to have the society's medal—"

"Oh, good Lord, no!" exclaimed Ralph, with dismay. "Let 'em give it to the firemen—they must have done a heap more than I did: I saw there while I was perched up there. Don't—don't, for Heaven's sake, let them bother about me!"

"Who cares a blow about you!" retorted Sir Thomas. "It's those belonging to you, my dear fellow. Give the medal to that sweet young creature: she'll wear it for you, and next heart, I expect. And now the order of the day is: chops and steaks, port and stout, and—Oh, you'll do all right! You're a lucky young dog! Good-bye! Sha'n't come again; but, I tell you what, I'll turn up at your wedding, if you'll ask me, for medals or no medals, I like a brave man."

In a few days Ralph was able to leave his bed. He was as weak as a woman and as shaky as a piece of cheap furniture much to his surprise and annoyance; but his room was transformed to a paradise by the love of the friends who brightened it for him. To say nothing of Veronica, whose presence filled it with joy, Ada and Mr. Saintsbury were constant visitors, and Martha, whose admiration for Ralph and amiable envy of Veronica were comically obvious, still took her share in the nursing.

Veronica would bring her work and sit beside him, with Ada on a stool at her feet, her head resting against her knee, and Mr. Saintsbury on the other side of the fire—it was well into autumn by now, and somewhat chilly—all their thoughts concentrated on the man who had risked his life—and so nearly lost it—for the sake of the child.
Mr. Saintsbury often sat and smoked in a ruminating silence. It had fallen on him the day Ralph's bandages had been re-

moved and Mr. Saintsbury had been able, for the first time, to see his face distinctly. He had looked at Ralph with an air of surprise and bewilderment, as if he were trying to recall something to his memory; and one afternoon, when he and Ralph happened to be alone—Veronica and Ada had gone out to buy some of the chops and steaks ordered by the doctor—Mr. Saintsbury began in a hesitating way to speak of the future which Ralph was quietly and remorsefully worrying about.

"You know I'm a rolling-stone, Farrington," he said, "and rolling-stones, as you are aware, do not gather much moss."

"But they have a good time generally," put in Ralph, with a smile.

"That's so," nodded Mr. Saintsbury, as he filled his pipe. "Anyway they get some experience. And that's valuable. Now, I chanced to pick up a little moss. I've got a ranch out Ballarat way; it's not very large affair; but it would give us all a living; I mean you and Miss Veronica, and Ada and me, to say nothing of Martha. The question is whether you would care for it—Oh, Lord if I'd half the money I've wasted I could make a rich man of you!" he broke off with a groan.

"That's all right," said Ralph. "But you mustn't worry about me. I can go and rough it, and try to make a fortune, and—and then come back for Veronica."

Mr. Saintsbury smiled and shook his head.
"Don't deceive yourself, young man. If I know Miss Veronica, she won't lose sight of you again. No, we must all go together, for Ada—well, Ada wouldn't consent to part with you, and I— It seems to me that in addition to saving lives from fire, you have a peculiarly taking way with you, Ralph. Even if I did not owe my Ada to you, I should be loth to lose you. No, we'll all go over together. I know the game, and you, too, know it—"

He stopped abruptly and glanced at Ralph with a reflective frown.
"By the way, what was the name of the place you lived in?"
"I have been in several parts of Australia," said Ralph. He hesitated a moment. "My mother and I had reason to shift our quarters pretty frequently. Her second husband was—a bad lot, and we tried to keep clear of him. She was always afraid that he would find us—he deserted her when I was a child—and she'd take fright now and again and insist upon our moving. He never did find us, I'm thankful to say."
Mr. Saintsbury nodded.
"What was your mother's name, I mean the name of her second husband?" he asked in a low voice.
Ralph smiled bitterly.
"I scarcely know," he said. "As far back as I can remember she used to change her name for fear that he might trace her if she went by the name he bore when she married him. I

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say when she married him, because he had as many aliases as an habitual criminal."

He spoke so bitterly, with such reluctance, that Mr. Saintsbury forebore asking further questions; but, as he puffed at his pipe he glanced now and again at Ralph with the same uneasy and puzzled air.

That evening they all sat round the fire, and Mr. Saintsbury enlarged upon his ranching plan. Veronica's face was suffused with quiet joy and her eyes stole with bashful stealthiness under their long, dark lashes to Ralph's grave face.

"It is a dream of an earthly paradise!" she whispered.

"You'll be married before you go, of course," said Mr. Saintsbury; whereupon the blush became scarlet and her head drooped still lower over her work. "There's no reason why you shouldn't be; in fact, it would be better."

(To be continued.)

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