# The Snake

CHAPTER XIX.

(Continued.)
"Beg pardon, sir," he said, in his toneless voice. Then he put down the with noiseless assiduity, he glanced at the reflection of the dark face in

morning," said Talbot, coldly, as Gib I hear, and I am not surprised. That hang-dog face of yours would convict the first train, and don't come her

"Yes sir," responded Gibbon, in ex actly the same toneless unmove voice, as he stood with meekly bowe head until his master had left th room: then his manner changed swift cheeks, his colourless eves shone with back an oath. He went quickly to th spreading it out he was reading turning step. He squeezed up the let ter and dropped it on the spot in with the tweed suit.

"The letter?" said Talbot. Gibbon looked about him with dutiful alacrity, and Talbot picked it up

"It wasn't that," muttered Gibbon musingly. "It wasn't that, serious as it is. He was looking bad before when I came in. What is it? What i it. I wonder? He's in a tighter place than usual. I've never seen him show

He went all over the pockets in the tweed suit, searched the room in his stealthy, noiseless fashion, but though nothing rewarded him he was still unsatisfied.

face of his" he muttered "I've watched him all these months like a cat a mouse, but I've never seen him look so bad. He's too sharp as a rule; but to-night he looked as if-as if he was hard drove. Curse him! For all his sharpness. I'll find him out. 'Hang-dog face!' 'Hang-dog face!' You little think, Mr. Talbot Denby when you're sneaking to me and threatening, how often I feel like

Talbot found the drawing room

to-night, sir," said the butler; "and vaulted the fence and entered the Miss Gresham has a headache and begs you will excuse her."

Talbot inclined his head and check ed a sigh of relief. He was in no mood for company that evening for he knew that, admirable actor as he was, it would be difficult to assume a

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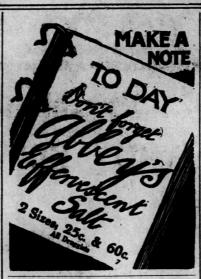
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drank glass after glass of claret when and he finished up with that. The liquor set his blood moving-

to had felt cold ever since he ha had he let the ruffian time to babbl He went upstairs to his room after

room and heard his master pacing u and down: then suddenly the sound of bon, peeping through the key-hole saw Talbot put on an overcoat, tur up the collar, and, with a cap draw well over his face, go to the door an

huge house, and Talbot seeing th

then slipping downstairs, caught u his own coat and hat, and like, his master, turning up the collar and drawing down the cap, followed steal

Talbot went through the shrubber; Gibbon pausing also: then, skirting the lawn, walked quickly along the fence that divided the park from the stopping to light a cigar; sauntered along it, as if he were taking an after-

The night had grown rather cloudy and the moon was obscured at times rank tobacco coming from the wood on the left. His master had evidently also noticed it, for he stopped, and "His lordship dines in his own room with a cautious glance round him he

> Gibbon, stealthily slipped from tree to tree, followed; his light-grey eyes blinking like a ferret's, his lips hanging loosely like a blood-hound's.

> > CHAPTER XX.

Talbot stealthily approached the direction of the rank, smouldering tobacco, but in a roundabout way, so that he described something like a trees and slipping cautiously through the undergrowth.

As he did so, his foot struck against some object which gave out a metallic him that this was one. He closed the

He had slipped from the felled tree,

on the trunk. He was in a heavy and upon it and extinguished the vile-

Then he stood with his hands in his pockets and looked down at the sleeping man. What an irony of fate that

it not be possilbe to take the papers rom him without disturbing him. But the thought of touching the

nan with his hand was so repugnan im; but it came back to him after a fellow would be, if not harmless at least at a disadvantage in making terms. No doubt he would attach the usual undue importance to them. It looked so easy to abstract them tha the temptation grew, as Talbot looked Voiselessly he moved slowly, inch by inch nearer, and kneeling down stretched out his hand towards the rough fustian pocket; but as he touch od it Oatway snored and moved his read. Talbot's hand flew back, but he eld it ready, and, as the man did not wake, he approached the coat again and gently drew it back, discovering

he pocket. He could see the edge of the pocketbook, and the sight of it increased his agerness. With strained nerves and rembling fingers he delicately opened he mouth of the pocket, took hold of he edge of the book and was drawing t out slowly and cautiously when Datway stirred, yawned heavily, and pened his blood-shot eyes.

For a momnt he did not clearly see he figure kneeling in front of him. but he light happened to become better and Ootway saw who it was, saw the white hand at his pocket, and knowing nstinctively what it meant, sprang to is feet with an oath and threw himself upon Talbot, who, not having had ime to rise went down.

"You thief!" cried Oatway, hoarsely, with a torrent of oaths. "You'd steal he papers, would you? You'd creep on a man when he's a-takin' his rest. is honest sleep, and rob him! I'll each you!

He dealt Talbot two or three heavy lows and attempted to hold him down vith his knee. The blows maddened Calbot, and, swearing almost as vilely s the man, he wriggled from under he knee and managed to get to his eet. For a second or so the two men stood glaring at each other; then Oatvay went for Talbot again. But Talot was prepared for the attack.

He had never distinguished himself very greatly at the 'varsity sports, but there are some things which one earns at public schools and colleges which lie dormant, so to speak, until hey are called for. One may forget one's Latin and Greek, but the boxing and wrestling remain. Talbot struck out with his left and caught his opponent on the jaw, and Oatway staggered and seemed about to go down; but the trunk of a tree saved him, and, pulling himself together, he made for Talbot with the rush of a bull. Talbt's arm shot out again, but Oatway dodged the blow, and, throwing his arms round Talbot, tried to bring him to the ground; but Talbot had got his feet well apart and was able not only to

hold his ground, but to get a good grip, They swayed this way and that firmly locked, their faces so close that Talbot, with a sickening sense of loathing, could feel on his cheek the man's horrible breath, see his blood-

shot eyes glaring into his own. It was a terrible struggle, one that looked as if it were for life or death; and Gibbon, from his place behind a tree, watched it with a sinister enjoyment. He expected every moment to see his master go under; but, strangely enough, Talbot seemed able to hold

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nent, when Oatway managed to thrust self at the foot of the tree, and, peering round, watched and waited for the denouement with a satisfaction

Talbot, half stunned by the fall and

clusion of the drama.

(To be continued.)

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