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—but you know her better than I do, or ever shall do, I daresay."

"I'm going up to the Court to-morrow," said Fanny, archly; "and I've a great mind to tell her what you say."

"With all my heart!" laughed Ralph, but with a sudden heightening of color. "It strikes me that she wouldn't feel very interested in my opinion of her."

"Oh, I don't know," said Fanny, with an affectation of candour. "It isn't everybody Miss Veronica takes notice of; and if I were in your place I should feel highly flattered at having her fishing with you. In fact, I consider you a very lucky man, Mr. Ralph."

"Thank you, Miss Fanny," said Ralph, rather ruefully and inwardly wincing; "though I don't quite see where the luck comes in," he added as he recalled his snubbing of the morning. "And now I must go on my rounds."

"Oh, you needn't hurry," she remonstrated. "You're early yet."

"How do you know?" retorted Ralph, with a laugh and some surprise.

Fanny coloured. She could not confess that she watched him every evening and that most of his comings and goings were known to her.

"Oh, I only guessed it because I wanted you to stay," she said, shyly. "Just five minutes more, while you finish your pipe."

He was indeed earlier than usual, and of course Ralph yielded; and as he bent back in the comfortable Albert chair, as the big kitchen ones with arms are called, Fanny got out her work and sat on the other side of the table, every now and then glancing out of the corner of her soft brown eyes at the handsome but somewhat pensive face.

"So Mr. Talbot's gone back to London," she said presently.

"What a handsome gentleman he is, isn't he?"

Ralph nodded assent.

"Yes; he's a good-looking chap," he assented.

"Such a distinguished-looking gentleman," murmured Fanny, still watching him out of the corner of her eyes.

"Yes, oh, yes!" assented Ralph again.

"I wonder if there's any truth in what they say; that he and Miss Veronica are going to make a match of it?"

Ralph looked up quickly, then as suddenly became engrossed in stopping the tobacco in his pipe.

"Oh, do they say so?" he said, indifferently.

"Yes," replied Fanny, with a knowing nod of her yellow head. "You see it would be a good match for both of them. Miss Veronica would be a countess, and Mr. Talbot would get his lordship's money— Oh, perhaps I oughtn't to have said that, for it's a kind of secret that the earl's going to leave Miss Veronica his money. I heard it from his lordship's gentleman, Mr. Welford, you know. But there! there's no harm in telling you, Mr. Ralph."

(To be Continued.)

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CHAPTER VIII.

The tramp looked up also. The pouch was suddenly crushed in his hand, and, slipping behind a tree, the man leant forward and stared at Talbot Denby with so strange an expression, one so full of amazement and malignity, that Ralph was staggered.

"Who—who's that?" he asked, hoarsely, his bandaged hand laid on Ralph's with as much of a clutch as its condition would allow. "Who is it! Quick? He'll be past! Tell me his name, d—n you!"

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, my friend," said Ralph, sternly, "and get over that fence. I've had about enough of you."

The dog-cart was just abreast of them, and the man, hissing warningly and shrinking farther behind the tree, glared at Talbot until he had passed. Then he drew his bandaged hand across his face as if to wipe away the sweat which had started on it, and turned to Ralph with a flickering, deprecating leer.

"Beg pardon, mate," he whined. "I

only thought as I'd seen the general afore. But I see I was mistook. Anybody can be mistook, can't they?" he whined. "There ain't no 'arm in asking you who the swell is, is there?"

"He is Mr. Talbot Denby, Lord Lynborough's nephew and heir," said Ralph, as the quickest way of getting rid of the man. "I'll trouble you for my pouch. Thanks! And now—"

"Right, right you are, guv'nor," said the man. "I'm much obliged to you for the 'acca and—your kind answers to my enkwiries; very much obliged!"

Ralph watched him as he went down the road, and saw him presently turn his evil and still working face to gaze after the departing dog-cart, his stout clay pipe clenched so tightly between his bloated lips that the yellow fangs were exposed like those of a savage cur.

CHAPTER IX.

Ralph had not forgotten the trout he had been "ordered" to leave at the Masons', and having cleaned it he took it up to the cottage as he started on his evening round. He had intended leaving it with "Miss Veronica's compliments," but Fanny came running down the little garden path to meet him, and, with a blush and smile of welcome on her pretty face, pressed him to enter.

"Oh, you must come in and let

mother thank you, Mr. Ralph!" she said, apparently out of breath with her short run. "She'll be so disappointed. Besides, you can't be in such a terrible hurry. "Terrible" was the favorite Lyne adjective, and it came very expressively from Fanny's pretty lips.

Ralph went in; she drew a chair up for him, and took his cap and put it on the sideboard, placed the fish on a dish, and called her mother in to admire the gift.

"Oh, but you must thank Miss Gresham!" said Ralph. "The fish belongs to her, at least Lord Lynborough, and she ordered me to leave it."

Fanny smiled incredulously.

"All very fine, Mr. Ralph; but we can guess who put it into her head. Oh, we know you gentlemen don't like being thanked; don't we, mother? And now you're here you must have some supper. See, I was just laying the cloth! He must, mustn't he, mother—or we shall think he didn't want us to have the trout; and you're so fond of it, aren't you, mother? And it's so nice to see anyone, and to have a talk! I'm sure life's dreary enough with nothing but work, work, work all day!"

"Well! But I mustn't stay long," said Ralph, yielding to the soft voice and pleading persistence. He was still sore from Veronica's treatment of him, and Fanny's evident desire for his company soothed the wound to self-love which the proud Miss Gresham had so wantonly inflicted.

Fanny bustled about, but not noisily or obtrusively, and laid the supper, and Ralph was bidden with a winning smile to draw his chair up to the table. It was a change from the almost silent meals with the grim and taciturn Burchett, and Ralph enjoyed not only the good, though simple fare, but Fanny's bright smiles and girlish laughter. Her fair face was flushed with pleasure; she was as gay as a young finnet, and as soft as a dove, and she almost cooed as she pressed him to take some more butter.

"I saw you fishing this morning," she said, as Mrs. Mason began to

clear the things away. "You and Miss Veronica—Oh, do fight your pipe! I know you men always like to smoke the moment after you've eaten anything! I suppose you were teaching her? How clever she is, isn't she? And don't you think she's very beautiful? I do!"

"Yes, oh, yes; I suppose she is," admitted Ralph, but without a corresponding enthusiasm. He was not altogether guileless, and he knew that the best of women find it difficult to listen with pleasure to the praise of another's looks.

"Oh, you only suppose? She is, you know she is. I'm sure everybody must admire her. And she's so sweet and kind-hearted."

"Oh, is she?" said Ralph, rather drily. "I can't say I've noticed that



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