

The Snake Scotched Justice Done.

CHAPTER V. (Continued.) "You have every right to do what you please with the money, sir," he said at last...

"Why not? He is, I suppose, no worse than the ordinary run of men. She would make a fine Countess of Lynborough. I don't like him: he is not worthy of her. But what man is worthy of any woman? Shall I suggest it? Scarcely necessary; he'll think of it swiftly enough, trust him!"

"Veronica has grown into a beautiful woman, don't you think, Talbot?" Talbot shot a glance at the white, sphinx-like face.

"Into a very lovely one," he said, promptly and warmly. "I was quite startled when she came into the room this evening; I had not seen her for some time."

"She will be rather a good match, murmured the earl, musingly. "It is scarcely necessary to say that she is very much admired. Even without the fortune she would probably have made a good marriage."

"Most assuredly!" said Talbot, rising. "Shall I give you my arm into the drawing-room, sir?"

"Thanks, no. If you will please ring for my man, I will go to bed. Don't let me keep you from Veronica."

The hall door was open and Talbot went outside and paced up and down for a minute or two before entering the drawing-room. He was still staggering under the blow he had received; he, and he only knew how badly he wanted the money. Indeed, it was absolutely imperative that he should have it. The significance of the earl's encomiums of Veronica were not, of course, lost upon him. Yes; she was a beautiful woman; he hated marriage and would have put it off as long as possible; but—

He looked through the window into the drawing-room. Veronica was seated at the piano, but she was not playing, though one hand was still resting lightly on the keys; the other supported her chin, and she was looking before her as if she were lost in thought. She had a picture lovely enough to thrill any man; but Talbot Denby's heart beat with an emotion far different from that of admiration or love. He only saw the girl, the dependent, who had robbed him of his uncle's money. After a moment or two he forced the scowl from his face, and, with a smile, went in through the window.

"Will you play or sing for me, Veronica?" he said.

Veronica was faintly surprised at the softness, the friendliness of his tone. It did not occur to her that the

Ralph Faringdon?

But if she were, she was doomed to disappointment; there was no stalwart figure standing out against the sky; her "mood for solitude" was gratified.

She walked along the bank, trying to persuade herself that "she was not in the least disappointed; but, soon satiated with her solitude, she was turning away to return to the house when she heard a step behind her, and Ralph came up with his rod in his hand. The blood did not rush to her face—but only a woman can tell what it cost her to keep it back—and she inclined her head slightly and curiously as he raised his cap.

"Good morning, Miss Gresham," he said in his frank, self-possessed way. "Sorry you didn't come down yesterday; the fish rose well, and I got a good basket, though I kept all the best places for you—which was a pity."



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earl had told Talbot that she was an heiress, and if it had she would not have denied any man of Talbot's class so mean as to be influenced, so quickly influenced, by the fact.

He leaned against the piano as she sang for him, and expressed his gratitude in the same softened, ingratiating manner.

"Your voice has immensely improved," he said. "It was always sweet and clear, but you sing like an artist now."

"I've had good lessons," she said. "Lord Lynborough has been very good to me."

"No wonder!" he said. "How could he—how could anyone be otherwise?" He bent over towards her as he spoke, his black eyes resting on hers with an expression of admiration. But he saw, by the look of surprise that came into her eyes, that he was going too fast, and, with dexterous facility, he began to talk of the earl's health and the people on the estate. He must step slowly and guardedly, he told himself. This was no shallow-minded girl to be caught by a sudden ardour, however well simulated. Looking into the depths of those violet-grey eyes he knew that she would have to be wooed before she was won. So he went cautiously.

The next morning, after she had answered the letters, Veronica went up to her room and stood looking out of the window musingly, her under lip caught in her teeth, a faint tinge of colour coming and going in her face. But the woman who hesitates is lost. Still resolving that she would not go to the stream, she exchanged her morning frock of muslin for a tailor-made costume of grey homespun, and left the house by the back hall.

Talbot was standing on the entrance, reading the Times and smoking a cigarette, and he looked up quickly as the graceful figure passed him and went down the steps.

"Are you going for a walk? May I come with you?" he said, expecting a ready assent; but Veronica smiled and shook her head.

"No, thanks," she replied, with a coolness that surprised him. "I am in the humour for solitude this morning."

Her face crimsoned a moment or two after as she thought of her reply. Solitude! Was she not going to the stream on the chance of meeting

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Succotash can be made as well with string beans as with limas.

"I have come this morning," said Veronica. "Ah!" he said; "and I've left your rod at home. I found a nice light one, but you may not use it." "No," she said, in a tone of command. "I cannot wait. I will use this one."

"As you please," he said, cheerfully. He looked at her workman-like dress approvingly, but eyed her boots doubtfully. "They're not water-proof, I suppose? No, ladies' boots never are; you can't wade. Never mind. Here is the rod. Throw the fly just below the stone, where the ripple is. Oh, very good!"

She made several casts, then, impatiently: "Why doesn't a fish rise?" "There isn't one there," he said, drily. "There was one, but your fly came down like a lump of lead and frightened him. You must throw more lightly."

"Show me please," she commanded. He took the rod—the butt still held the warmth of her hand, and it seemed to run like an electric thrill up his arm and to his heart—and showed her how to drop the fly like a piece of thistledown.

"Oh, I see," she retorted, pettishly; "but I shall never do it."

"Never is a long day," he remarked encouragingly. "Why, that's better already. Fact is—you are rather nervous for a moment—you are rather nervous. I'll leave you alone for a bit."

"I was never nervous in my life," she said, eyeing him with superb surprise at his audacity.

He fought with a smile, but walked away for a few yards and threw himself down on the grass, leaning on his elbow; she went on making casts, but suddenly she stopped and, thinking she had got the line entangled, he rose and went to her.

"Anything the matter?" Her face was flushed with annoyance and she was fumbling at something. "Why, yes! You have got the hook in your wrist!"

"Yes, and I cannot get it out. Take it out, please," she added, and she held out her arm imperiously.

He took the hand, his lips growing tight, his brows coming down in a kind of frown.

"Easier said than done," he said, gravely. "You have got it over the barb, and I am afraid I shall hurt you, Miss Gresham."

She smiled at him disdainfully. "So small a thing as that hurt me! Please pull it out!"

His eyes were fixed on the snow-white wrist in which the little fly was embedded, and they were still downcast as he took a small pair of scissors from his pocket.

"I can't pull it out. I must cut the skin—oh, very slightly; but it will hurt, though I will be as gentle as I can."

She laughed again. "It does not look a very formidable operation," she said. He raised his eyes for an instant and looked at her, and something in their expression sent the blood rushing to her face. She saw that he was pale, his lips set tightly, as if with the effort of repression, and she felt his hand tremble as it held her lightly but firmly.

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