



## The Snake Scotched Justice Done.

CHAPTER XXVII.

(Continued.)

Then, suddenly his mind shifted to another subject: Fanny Mason. He had wearied of her very quickly, and had discarded her and closed the house at St. John's Wood. He had endeavoured to effect the separation "amiably," but Fanny in a fit of passion had refused the money he had offered her and had disappeared. He dismissed her from his thoughts. After all, she could do him no harm. It was very unlikely that she would return to Lynne. She must have saved money from her allowance, and she had, of course, taken the jewellery he had given her. Nor there was no need to worry himself about Fanny Mason. He forgot that she was wanted as a witness, and that detectives were searching for her.

He went slowly back to the house and met Doctor Campbell coming out of the library.

"The earl?" asked Talbot, with every appearance of affectionate anxiety.

"He is asleep. I was going to fetch Welford to sit with him."

"I will stay with him," said Talbot. "I would rather; he would like it."

"I am going for some medicine," said Doctor Campbell, "and I shall not be long. Don't let him agitate himself; if he should wake, keep him quiet."

Talbot stole in. The old man was lying back in his big chair sleeping of mental and physical exhaustion. Talbot sat down and looked at him keenly. He might die at any moment in this death-like slumber. Was the will in Veronica's favour destroyed? His eyes went to the safe, and he started. The keys were in the lock. It would only take a moment.

He stole to the safe, and, glancing over his shoulder at the earl, opened it. There were a number of papers and deeds filed methodically inside, and with noiseless haste he turned them over. Presently he found one endorsed "Will."

He untied the red tape and ran his eyes over the document. It was a will made soon after Veronica's flight, and left him Wayneford and the money! He smiled with satisfaction, then searched for the Veronica will.

Just as he had found it, he heard a step outside, and with a start he tossed the will back into the safe and stole to a chair. The step passed, and he went back to the safe. A moment afterwards the folded parchment was on the top of the fire. It caught at once, and he watched it until it had smouldered into a heap of charcoal. He was gently and cautiously stirring it into the body of the fire when the earl awoke with a deep sigh and looked round him confusedly.

"Talbot!" he said.

Talbot got up and went to him with affectionate anxiety.

"Are you better, sir? Will you come to bed now; is there anything I can get you?"

"No, no, thank you. It was good of you to stay with me."

The voice and tone were strangely gentle for the once stern and cynical earl. "You know that I quite appreciate your position, your disappointment. But my son, Talbot! My own son!"

"Yes, yes, sir; very natural," assented Talbot, soothingly. "But you must not agitate, excite yourself. Will you not come—"

"No, no. There is something I want to do. Come for me in half an hour. You need not be afraid to leave me. Go please, Talbot."

There was the old tone of command in the voice, and Talbot could not disobey.

When he had gone the earl rose with difficulty and, steadying himself by the furniture, went to the safe. He noticed the disordered condition of the deeds and frowned thoughtfully and presently he found one will.

He laid it on the table and searched for the other; but it was not there. Had Bolton taken it? No; he remembered seeing him replace them both. With the other will in his hand he moved back to the fire and stared at it mutely, and suddenly he saw a fluttering ember of parchment.

None of the Denbys were fools. In an instant he had leapt to the right conclusion. The keys had been left in the safe, Talbot had been kneeling by the fire—

The old man shrank as if he had been struck. That a Denby, the man so nearly become his heir and successor, should be guilty of an act so heinous overwhelmed him with grief and shame.

The perspiration stood out in beads on his forehead and he trembled like a leaf. Then his lips moved.

"Be it so!" he muttered. "He has lugged a pit and fallen into it. He is a common criminal! He has lugged the pit, there let him lie!"

Certainly Mr. Talbot Denby's unlucky star was in the ascendant, for the will the earl held in his hand was that he had made in Veronica's favour. Talbot had destroyed the wrong one!

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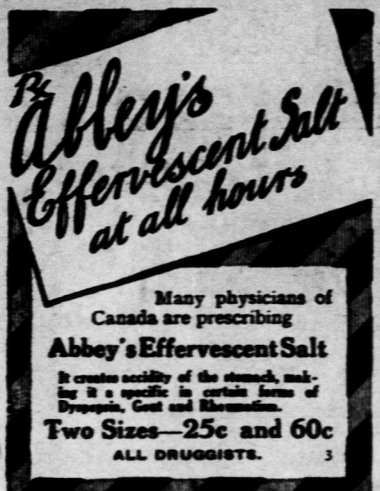
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—"Lord Denby," murmured Mr. Sainsbury.

"I beg your pardon, Lord Denby, if you prefer it, is remanded on a charge of willful murder!"

Veronica looked up quickly, and with a catch in her breath.

"But you yourself said he ought to be discharged!"

Mr. Selby smiled again.

"So I should have said if the evidence had been twice as strong, Miss Fresham. If I am to speak plainly—"

She was pale now, and her lovely eyes met his bravely.

lous to do so the moment his doctor will permit, and I should not be surprised if he refuses to wait for the permission," said Mr. Selby.

His surmise was a correct one, for the next morning the earl came down early, and Welford followed with his lordship's hat and fur coat.

"Surely you are not going out, sir?" said Talbot, with grave remonstrance.

"Yes," replied Lord Lynborough, eyeing him sternly. "I am going to the pris—to see my son."

"You will let me go with you, sir—as far as the town?" said Talbot.

It would make a favourable impression if he were seen accompanying the earl.

The earl declined with a gesture.

"Thank you; but I prefer to be alone," he said, and his eyes rested on Talbot's piercingly and with almost open contempt.

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Always in cooking vegetables, start them in boiling water. A teaspoonful of salt to each two quarts of water is the allowance.

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