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He stood for a few minutes leaning against the wall, his arms folded, his eyes downcast. The table had been put on its legs again, play had been resumed as if nothing had happened. Isaacs came back presently.

"He's quite gone, sare!" he said, stretching out his hands apologetically. "I'm sorry! I keep a respectable house, as you know, sare—"

Talbot Denby waved his apologies aside and left the place. As he emerged into the cool air of the June morning, he drew a long breath through his closed teeth and shrugged his shoulders.

"The cursed luck!" he muttered. "I shall have to go to the Court after all!"

It was characteristic of him that he had forgotten the thief, the struggle, the man's threat—everything but his ill-luck. In short, Mr. Talbot Denby, the "coming man," the rising politician, the heir to the Earldom of Lynborough, was a born gambler of the worst and most vicious type.

CHAPTER V.

"Are there any more letters?" asked Veronica.

She was seated at the bureau in the window of the library, the earl lying back in his big chair beside the fire. Veronica managed his correspondence as well as ran the vast place, and it was her custom to come to him in the library every morning and answer his letters for him.

"Thanks; there is nothing else, I think," he replied. "Ah, yes, there is this note from Talbot! He is coming down to-morrow—that is, if you care to have him."

Veronica raised her brows slightly. "Why not?" she said. "It is a long while since Mr. Denby has been here." It was noticeable that she called him "Mr. Denby" instead of "Talbot." Though she was a niece of Lord Lynborough's and Talbot Denby's cousin, her pride never allowed her to forget that she was a dependent, living on the caprice of the great earl and liable at any moment to be dismissed at his pleasure.

"Yes," he assented, drily. "Talbot rarely comes here except on business. I find no difficulty in guessing at his business on this occasion. Write and tell him he may come."

Veronica rapidly wrote a line or two saying that Lord Lynborough would be glad to see his nephew; then she said:

"If you are sure that is all, I think I will go out; it is the loveliest of mornings. Do you wish to me to go anywhere, do anything for you, Lord Lynborough?"

"If you are walking, you might go down to Burchett's and tell him that he may engage that young fellow. It seems that there was a difficulty; the man's character, testimonials, were rather vague, and Burchett referred the matter to me. Under ordinary

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circumstances, I should have sent the fellow packing; but you appeared to take an interest in him the other day, and I departed from my usual course; which, by the way, is the proper one; for it is not wise to have a man about the place of whom you do not know anything, good or bad. I hope your protégé will turn out well."

A faint color rose to Veronica's face. "He is scarcely a protégé of mine, Lord Lynborough," she said. "He behaved very well the other day and risked his life to save a dog, and a small one at that."

"My dear Veronica," he retorted, with his cynical smile, "that kind of courage is of the commonest, and is possessed by nine out of ten scoundrels."

"He did not look like a scoundrel," said Veronica.

"Nine out of ten don't," retorted the earl. "Tell Burchett the man may stay until he detects him stealing the game or planning a burglary up at the house."

Veronica laughed softly at this characteristic speech, and soon afterwards left the house. As she had said, it was a lovely morning, and the young blood in her veins was thrilling in harmony with the joyous song of the birds and the soft, warm sun of an English June. She went down to the keeper's hut but found no one there, and she passed through the spinney and across the meadows to the river Erne, which ran through the valley, now in placid reaches, and now broken by boulders and shallows. It was a famous trout stream; but it was rarely fished, excepting by chance visitors to the Court; for Talbot, though he sat a park hack with grace and ease, was not a sportsman; your gambler rarely is.

(To be Continued.)

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CHAPTER IV.

One of the men he had displaced, the man on the right, gave a kind of snarl and muttered an oath as he looked up and sullenly shifted his chair. He was an evil-looking fellow—but so were they all—with shifty eyes and a cunning, cruel mouth which writhed as he blinked at the dancing ball on the roulette board. Talbot Denby scarcely glanced at him; and, taking his seat, at once fell into the attitude of the rest, as he placed some gold on the table and pushed a sovereign into a black square of the design painted in circular form on the table. The ball fell to the corresponding colour, and he raked in his winnings with a curved white hand. As the play proceeded and he won or lost his stakes grew heavier, and some of the notes had taken their place beside the gold. There were many such piles in front of the players: it was astonishing that such a crew should be possessed of such wealth.

For a time Talbot Denby's luck

swung backwards from good to bad; but presently the bad set in firmly and one after another of the notes disappeared; but he played on, apparently unmoved, though his fellow-gamblers might have seen, if they had not been too engrossed to notice, that his lips were growing tighter and more bloodless, that his nostrils were becoming white and strained, and that the black eyes were glowing like points of fire under the half-lowered lids.

There were but few of the notes left, and he was placing one of them on a red square, when suddenly his lips parted with a snarl like that of a dog, his elbow crushed down upon the hand of the man beside him and he turned on him with the fury of a wild beast: he had caught the man in the act of stealing one of the notes.

The sudden low, repressed cry, all the more startling for its repression, shook the other players from their absorption. Snatching up their money, they sprang to their feet as one man, leaning forward and staring breathlessly at Talbot Denby, who had clutched the thief by the throat with an expression so savage, so primeval in its malignant ferocity that it was, in its incongruity with the refined face and graceful form, simply appalling.

The detected man struggled in the grasp of the long, lean fingers which held him as if in a vice and threatened to choke him, the two men were

swiftly locked in a fierce embrace and, swaying to and fro, overthrew the table. There were no shouts; indeed, not a loud word was spoken, as if, even in that moment of intense strain and excitement, all were aware that they dared not make any noise.

Isaacs rushed towards them, waving and wringing his fat, dirty hands, and in a hoarse whisper imploring them to be quiet.

"Shentlemen, shentlemen!" he hissed, hoarsely. "What ish the matter? Oh, Moses! The policesh—they'll hear you! What ish the matter?"

Talbot Denby moistened his lips and turned his dry tongue in his mouth ere he could speak.

"This scoundrel has stolen a note from me!" he said in a low voice.

"It's a lie!" retorted the man, pawing at his throat and glaring at the white face above him with the air of a cur bawled of a bone.

"He has it in his hand now," said Talbot.

As he spoke he bent towards a side-table and, snatching up a spirit decanter, struck the man's fist a terrible blow. The man's hand opened and the crumpled note fell on the floor.

He made a rush for his assailant, but before he could reach him, the Jew had flung his arms round him, and, aided by some of the other men, had dragged him to the floor.

In springing back, the soft felt hat, which had partly concealed Talbot Denby's face fell off, and he stood, the centre of the excited group, a strange contrast to the rest. He caught up the hat and put it on. The thief had got to his feet, but was still held by Isaacs and a couple of men.

"Out you go!" said Isaacs. "You're a cheat, a low cheat! We don't want your kindsh here. Thish ish a respectable place—" As they pushed the man towards the door, he turned and looked over his shoulder and waved his bleeding hand at Talbot Denby.

"See thish!" he cried, hoarsely, as if he were still choking. "I'll make you pay for thish some day. I'll make you sorry for it, as well as you are! I'll wait on you! It may be for months, it may be for years, but it may be to-morrow! I'll be even with you!"

Talbot Denby, calm and cold again, regarded the man's working face and blood-shot eyes with haughty indifference, and turned away contemptuously.

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