

**NO LUM**



**Only a Beggar;  
—BUT—  
A Queen Among Women**

**CHAPTER XXIV.**

Diana lay still for an hour or two, trying to force her thoughts away from Vane to her own future. To live she must work, and she must find work quickly; for she, who had spent her childhood in poverty, knew that her small stock of money, and the sum which she would get for her jewelry, would soon be exhausted. She could teach—she knew that; but who would employ her without references? She had her certificate, and that would help her, if she could account for her life since she had gained it. When she went down-stairs to the shabby room, that smelt of countless dinners and the cigars that the gentlemen boarders smoked after their evening meal, she found the room empty.

There was a morning paper on one of the chairs, and she took it up and eagerly—if the word is not ill-chosen, seeing that Vane, Vane, came between her and the paper—scanned the advertisements.

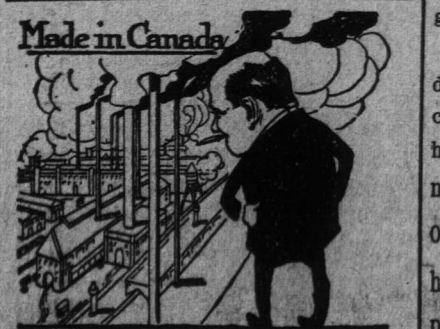
There was one by a schoolmistress who needed a teacher of drawing; and Diana read it through twice wistfully; and presently put on her outdoor things and went, by bus, to the address given. As she reached the door, she found a dozen or more women—how alike they all seemed, stamped by the hallmark of genteel poverty, poverty eloquent in their shabby but well-cared-for clothes, by their air of eager anxiety!—standing about the steps; and Diana took her place on the fringe of the group and waited, with head bent. At intervals a maidservant opened the door, an applicant emerged, and the maid beckoned the next. At last, after half-a-dozen had entered and come out again, the servant called out: "The situation's filled."

The disappointed ones turned away without a word, and Diana turned with them. As she did so she knocked against a girl who had been standing beside her, and Diana, seeing that she had caused the girl to drop a portfolio she had been carrying, begged her pardon, and, stooping, picked up the portfolio and held it out to her.

The girl took it, and looked up at Diana with shy, wistful eyes; they were as blue as a child's, and shone sadly in a pale, pretty face; so sadly that Diana said, impulsively: "I'm afraid a great many of us are disappointed."

"Yes," said the girl with a sigh which she checked, as if ashamed of it. "Did you notice how we turned away, as if we expected it?" Diana nodded. "Poor things!" she said involuntarily.

"The situation's filled."



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The other girl looked at her curiously, shyly.

"Are you not disappointed?" she said. "But perhaps it does not matter to you as much as it does to some of us?"

"Oh, yes, indeed it does," Diana replied. "I want work very badly. Are those your drawings?"

The girl nodded. "Yes. You have not brought yours?"

Diana started, and looked and felt foolish.

"I—I have none. Oh, yes! I can draw, but I thought that they would let me try. It was stupid!"

They had walked on, and the girl now stopped.

"I am going to take a bus here," she said. "Good-by."

"Good-by," said Diana, and she held out her hand.

The girl started slightly, a faint color came to her pale face, and, as if confused by the friendliness of a stranger, she merely touched Diana's hand, and, with an inarticulate murmur, hurried on.

Diana thought of the girl a great deal that day, and for many days after, when she, herself, was growing despairful of getting employment. For she found that in the great city one could get anything and everything but one's daily bread. Day by day she trod the weary, flint-sown path which he and she must tread who seek work in a town where for every place there are a thousand applicants.

She soon had to leave the comparative comfort of the boarding house, and, descending the scale of lodgings by quick degrees, took refuge in an attic—it was a descent, though she had to climb three flights of stairs—in a dingy house in one of the river-side streets. With some of the money that remained she had bought a type-writer, and by a piece of good fortune had succeeded in getting some employment from one of the institutions which give out copying-work.

It was badly paid, for the supply of typewriting does not correspond with the demand, and the market is cruelly overstocked; but, by writing early and late, she earned just enough to keep body and soul together.

The winter was almost upon her, she was insufficiently clad and fed; and, as she had no money to spend on newspapers, and no time to read them, she did not see the agonized appeals which Vane inserted almost daily. Indeed, if she had seen them, she would not have responded. The memory of the past was so great an agony that she tried to kill and bury it, to forget it in the daily, hourly struggle for mere existence.

But for the children—the grimy house was a rabbit warren for them—she would have lost heart altogether and let herself slip into the grave which despair digs; but at her worst and cruelest hours she could find some consolation in nursing a sick child, or feeding, with a share of her own scanty meal, a hungry one.

Desmond March had arranged to meet Garling at the night house near Leicester Square on the second night after the robbery, to share the spoils; and he went down there in a state of excitement and desperation, which he concealed behind his debonaire manner and careful smile.

The appointed time arrived, but his slave and tool did not put in an appearance, and, after waiting until the vile place was upon the point of closing, he went back to his rooms and ate his heart out until the morning paper came. With trembling hands he turned over the pages, but his bloodshot eyes could see no account of a burglary at Glenaskel Castle. What had happened? Had Garling failed? Had he sold his "master" and given him the slip?

As the days passed and Garling did not appear, Desmond came to the conclusion that Garling had betrayed him and escaped, and he began to make stealthy preparations for his own flight. Indeed, he had completed his arrangements and was on the point of leaving England when he saw a paragraph in one of the society papers. It was a discreet and cautiously worded hint that the engagement between Lord Dalesford and Miss Bourne had been broken off; and that Miss Bourne had left England for the benefit of her health, and was likely to remain abroad for a lengthy period.

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Desmond March drew a long breath and clutched the paper spasmodically. Was it true? Was he going to have another chance?

It seemed as if he were to have more than one, for as he was walking down Pall Mall that afternoon, his head more erect than it had been for weeks, a brougham stopped abreast of him, and a woman's voice said: "Mr. March?"

Desmond started slightly and went up to the brougham. A young woman with a plain, commonplace face and a nervous smile and blush held out her hand.

"You haven't forgotten me, I hope?" she said with a simper.

She was the daughter and heiress of a late eminent soap-boiler; one of the women who had gone down before Desmond March's fascinating face and manner. A little while ago, before Dalesford's engagement, she had almost proposed to Desmond March; but he had failed to respond; the earldom was then apparently near, and he was not down on his luck. But circumstances alter cases; and now as he pressed her hand he assured her that he had not only not forgotten her, but had thought of her every day since she had left London.

"Is that true?" she said, blushing still more redly, and with a smile of gratification widening her mouth. "Then come inside and let me drive you home for tea. I've still got my sister-in-law as watch-dog. So you've been thinking of me? Really, now?"

"Of course I'll come; delighted!" he said; and he opened the door, and was stepping in when a thin, girlish figure paused on the pavement behind him, and a voice he knew so well cried, despairingly: "Desmond!"

He heard it, and, with his hand on the door, looked toward her. Lucy waited, her eyes seeking his imploringly. She had not seen him for weeks, since the night he had promised to marry her and go away with her, the night he had taken her poor little savings. Surely he would leave this woman and come to her, would speak to her, at least!

"Who is that? What does she want?" asked Miss Bangs, the eminent soap-boiler's daughter, with contemptuous surprise.

Desmond March shrugged his shoulders.

"Beggings, I suppose," he drawled; and he took a shilling from his pocket and tossed it toward the white-faced girl with the piteous eyes. Then, as she recoiled with a low, heart-broken cry, he turned and entered the brougham and was driven away.

**CHAPTER XXV.**

"Can nothing be done, my lord?" It was Mr. Starkey who put the question, as he sat on the edge of his chair in the earl's room at Wedbury. It was in the afternoon, and the shaded lamp threw its greenish light upon the old man's face, and revealed its pallor and the hollows grief and disappointment had dug in it.

He shook his head and drew his thin white hand across his brow with a weary gesture.

"Nothing, I should say," he replied. "I have not seen Vane for weeks, for months. Have you?"

Mr. Starkey gave a low negative.

"I—I have heard of Lord Dalesford," he said hesitatingly.

"So have I. Who has not?" said the earl bitterly. "He must be mad; and if he is not already so, will be. No man could lead the life he is leading for long. They tell me—Captain Mortimer told me—that he is terribly changed—the shadow of his former self—and that he looks as if he were going to—". His voice broke, and he shaded his eyes with his hand. "I was afraid that it would end in this way. We Wrayboroughs take things seriously where our hearts are concerned; you know that, Starkey."

"And it is the awful suspense, uncertainty," murmured Mr. Starkey. "It is that which has told upon Lord Dalesford. I should have thought it impossible for any one to disappear so completely," he went on, after a pause, "especially so beautiful, so distinguished a young lady as Miss Bourne."

The earl nodded.

"Yes. And God knows every effort to discover her has been made; no stone has been left unturned."

"Mr. Fielding?"

"No; he cannot help us. He has done everything short of employing the police—though I think he has gone even as far as that—but has been as unsuccessful as the rest of us. She may have left the country—no, I agree with you," as Mr. Starkey shook his head. "We should have been able to trace her at one of the ports."

"And Mrs. Burton knows nothing?"

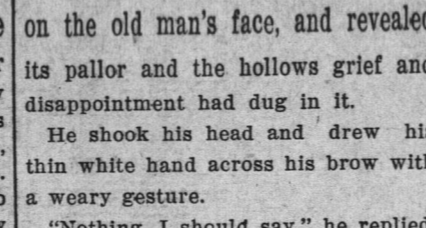
"Nothing. Or, if she does know anything, will not disclose it. She persists in remaining dumb to all our entreaties. She has left Rivermead and gone, no one knows whither. Heaven help us, we seem to be in an impasse; and my poor boy— But I beg your pardon, Starkey; you wanted to see me on business?"

Mr. Starkey nodded. "Yes, my lord. It is about the Sunningdale property. I have some good news—"

"Good news! Is it possible?" murmured the earl in bitter irony.

(To be Continued.)

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