



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

**CHAPTER VIII.**

In time, most of the sick children and old women in the village got accustomed to seeing his lordship and Miss Bourne walking down the village, his lordship carrying a basket, or a book, and listening intently to the young lady at his side; and, presently, the children began to share their allegiance to the beautiful young lady from Rivermead, with his lordship from Shortledge; for, when Diana was out of the way, Dalesford, at first shyly and awkwardly, always produced a packet of sweets and other delicacies from the yawning pockets of his loose shooting-jacket, and never failed to present them to the surrounding brats with awful threats of corporal punishment if they "told on him" to the lady who had gone up-stairs.

It was not all visiting the sick and needy with these two. There were picnics, boating expeditions, tennis, tea and dinner-parties, at which they were continually meeting; and each day Diana was growing accustomed to the society of this young nobleman, and insensibly forgetting his evil reputation. Indeed, a change was working in Dalesford—a remarkable change. Hitherto, he had found it impossible to remain in London, and its questionable amusements, from the theatrical supper-parties, the bacarat-tables, the feverish excitement of the race-meeting, for longer than a few days; but the days slipped by unnoted, and still found him at Shortledge, and found him content to be there. And, if he did run up to town, it was only for a few hours, for he was restless while he was there, and eager to get back to the simple delights at which he had once scoffed.

Of course, this sudden infatuation

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of his for country life, for tennis and boating, and the rest of it, was noticed by both gentle and simple of the place; but, though some of the latter nodded, and smiled, and whispered to each other when Diana and he passed, Lady Selina had no suspicion of the cause of his long visit. As a matter of fact, she and all his kin had come to regard Dalesford as invulnerable; and it certainly would not have occurred to her as possible that he should fall in love, with matrimonial intent—with a person of so little consequence as Miss Bourne, charming though she might be.

But a sharper pair of eyes was coming on the scene!

**CHAPTER IX.**

The afternoon of the school treat arrived, and not only Diana, but all her friends, including the servants at Rivermead, were in a state of wild excitement. If they had been going to a fete part of royalties they could not have thrown themselves into the affair with greater enthusiasm. The piles of buns and cakes, the pots of jam, the scores of dolls for the girls, and the balls and tops—they were "in" just then—for the boys, were discussed, counted, arranged in the methodical order insisted upon by the mistress of the feast, Diana, who superintended everything, and worked her willing slaves unmercifully.

The excitement extended to Shortledge, and was caught by even Lady Selina, who for days beforehand had driven to and from the village, with Tubby on her lap, yapping at everything and everybody, and adding to the confusion.

"The place is quite stirred up since Diana came," said Mabel, to whom it was "Diana" now. "She has awakened Sleepy Hollow. I declare, we're all changed; we've all been made to move ourselves. And some of us are improved. Vane, for instance—"

"You leave your elders alone, my sweet child," remarked Vane, who was seated on the balustrade of the terrace, smoking a cigarette.

"Vane is not half so slack—and, oh, think, Aunt Selina, how beastly lazy he used to be—"

"Beastly is not a word that should be used by a lady, Mabel," rebuked Lady Selina.

"Sorry, aunt; I caught it of that Selby boy. But it's true. And he's ever so much more polite and attentive—"

"The Selby boy?" asked Vane, innocently. "Yes, I've noticed his 'attentions.'"

"No; you. Nothing could make Bertie Selby polite. But I suppose you will draw the line at tea-fights, Vane? You'll go up to town, and come back when all the work's done, and say how fagged you are. So like a man!"

But, marvellous to relate, just after the proceedings had commenced, when the tables were laid, and the forms set, and the children were all agog with excitement, laughing, jumping, jostling, as children will do in their delighted moments, and Diana was going from one table to another, with plates of buns and cake in her hand, she heard a deep, but nobly resigned, voice at her elbow say:

"Anything I can do, Miss Bourne?"

The color rose to her face, and she hastened to excuse its presence by exclaiming, with simulated petulance:

"How you startled me! Good gracious, no! What did you imagine you could do? But it's very good of you to come and offer your services, all the same, Lord Dalesford!"

"Thank you," he responded, "Yes; I admit that I feel rather out of place at a school treat, and I can't think what induced me to come. Do you think it's softening of the brain?"

"It can't be that, Vane," interjected Mabel, who also bore her burden of plates. "You've got to have brains to soften, you know."

"Don't pay any attention to this young person's impertinence, Miss Bourne," he said; "but, now I'm here, take pity on me, and let me carry something."

"He'll drop it, if you do," Mabel asserted. "He always upsets the tea, if he attempts to carry a cup at home, and he'll be worse out here."

"Perhaps you'll be so kind as to see that the children get into their places without crowding, Lord Dalesford?" suggested Diana.

"Certainly," he said; but he stood



**Pans-pots**  
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with his hands thrust into his pockets, and his eyes fixed on Diana, as she moved swiftly, easily, to and fro; her presence accompanied, as it seemed to him, by a halo of sunshine; and it was not until the bell rang that he woke up, helped by a push from Mabel, and began to marshal the children to their places. His way of doing it was scarcely regular, though it proved effective enough.

"Now, youngsters, no crowding!" he said, with that air of comradship which children are so quick and so delighted to recognize. "Girls, sit opposite the cake; boys, opposite the bread and butter—else the girls will have no cake. Been a boy myself, and I know. Here, young man, you want a hand. Up with that!" as he helped one of the smallest urchins in to his place.

Mr. Selby said grace, the feast began, and the ladies and gentlemen who were ministering to the wants of the children—who ate as if they had not seen food for weeks—were kept hard at it. Now, it was noticeable that Mabel and Bertie worked in double harness, and that, wherever Diana happened to be—and she seemed to be in several places at once—Dalesford was sure to be close to her elbow. He was not of much use at this part of the proceedings, and once, in lifting a kettle, he nearly succeeded in

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scalding himself and several other persons; but he appeared to be perfectly happy, and, wherever he went, the children looked up at him with a smile, for that easy-go-lucky way of his won all their hearts, especially the girls.

"You don't think any of them will—explode?" he asked Diana, with mock anxiety. "I've got my eye on one or two cases that threaten to be fatal. That boy there, for instance, has eaten enough for a carter, and has drunk eight cups of tea."

Diana laughed. How happy she was! Happier than she had ever been at any other school treat; but, then, she assured herself, no other had ever been so successful as this!

"Oh, no; he's all right. Do, please, see that they have enough."

"Oh, all right," he responded. "But, mind, you take all the risks! It's your show, remember. Now, my little man, try another piece of cake. What, no? Oh, yes, you can. You stand up, and see. What! as bad even as that? And, now, what do you do with 'em?" he asked, going back to Diana's side. "Let 'em lie on the grass and recover!"

"Oh, dear no!" she replied, her eyes all alight with joy, her lips parted with what Dalesford thought an angelic smile. "They are going to play now."

Dalesford groaned. "You wouldn't be so cruel!"

"Yes. They are going to have skipping-rope."

"It sounds like sudden death—"

"And rounders and cricket. And—and—I'm afraid the tiny ones will want kiss-in-the-ring."

"Thank heaven that no one even with the grossest flattery could call me a tiny one!" he said. "What shall I do?"

"You can hold a skipping-rope. No, no! I didn't mean it, Lord Dalesford; I didn't, indeed," she broke off swiftly as he looked round for a rope.

"Oh, in for a penny, in for a pound," he said, with an air of resignation. "I ought to be thankful that I'm not expected to skip. What's that fool of a boy doing?"

That fool of a boy was Bertie, who was having his pocket handkerchief tied over his eyes, that he might be the first victim in blind man's buff, and who was "swung off" by mischievous Mabel with a heartiness that sent him literally spinning.

(To be Continued.)

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