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Only a Beggar;

A Queen Among Women

CHAPTER III.

"Yes—oh, yes," responded Diana quickly. "We shall be very grateful, shall we not, Aunt Mary? You have been so kind, so considerate. Yes, pray help me; pray tell me what I ought to do."

"Well," he said, leaning forward, and looking at her with a curious expression, as if he were on his guard, "if you are so good as to allow me to advise you, I should say: Don't launch out just at first. In fact, if I were you, Miss Bourne, I think I would say nothing about this sudden—good fortune of yours down at Wedbury. There is no need to make this vast legacy public. The newspapers are so eager to get hold of anything sensational; they would jump at the chance of making a story of this sudden acquisition of wealth; would—er—rake up—I mean, allude to your father's long absence." He did not look at Mrs. Burton, but he saw her hand grip the chair tightly, and her lips writhe. "In fact, you would become public property, and as famous—I was going to say as notorious—as the fashionable beauty, or a popular—actress. And, I am sure, you would not like that kind of fame; would not care to see your portrait in the society journals, with some such line as this under it: 'Miss Bourne, who inherited over a million of money from her father, whom she had not seen since childhood.'"

Diana winced, and shrank back. "Oh, no, no," she said in a low voice. "I would rather—"

"Not possess the money," he said, with a nod of approval. "Quite so. Now, I would suggest that you—and Mrs. Burton—be nodded to the elder woman reassuringly and encouragingly, as if he should say: 'There is no need for alarm; all is well—take a trip abroad for a time. You can go round the world, if you like. You have almost enough money to construct a railway to the moon. Go

where you like, stay as long as you like, enjoy yourself. While you are away, I will look out for a nice little house to which you can come when you are tired of globe-trotting. Then you yourself shall choose a larger place, an estate suitable to so wealthy a young lady, a house in town, and the rest of it. Oh, but forgive me!" he broke off, with an air of apology—"I am taking it for granted that you will wish me to remain in the position of your solicitor and adviser."

"Yes, yes," said Diana eagerly. "Of course I do. I shall be only too grateful if you will be my friend, as you were once that of my dead father, and will take care of this money, and will look after Aunt Mary and me."

Mr. Fielding smiled. "The latter will be the pleasantest part of my duty, believe me, Miss Bourne," he said, with a smile. "I have your late father's affairs in hand, and I will go into them, and watch over your interests. You will stay in town for a time, of course; I should recommend—"

He mentioned one of the grandest and most expensive of the London Hotels.

Diana's face fell, and she looked at her aunt wistfully.

"Oh, must we?" she said hesitatingly, and with evident reluctance. "I—I should like to go back to Wedbury at once. I may have so short a time to stay there; and I want to see as much of the children—before I leave them forever."

Mr. Fielding laughed, and for quite a minute his keen eyes softened, as they dwelt upon the beautiful face of the great heiress, whose eyes were dim at the thought of leaving a parcel of children.

"Very well, then," he said. "Go back by all means. But you must write to me; come and see me whenever you want to do so. Please do not forget that you may have as much money as you want. Ah, yes; we will open that account. I'll go down with you to the bank at once."

He rose, and rang for his hat, while the clerk brought and offered to him, with an air of one performing a religious ceremony, Mr. Fielding drew on his gloves, looking under his eyelids, and smiling at the two timid women.

"Come, then," he said. "The bank is not far; we will walk, shall we?"

He opened the door for them to precede him, and Diana passed out. Mrs. Burton was following her, but paused, and, going back to the room, picked up a glove which she had let fall from her nervous hands. Mr. Fielding waited for her, and she drew near to him, and beckoned him to approach. Her lips moved for a second, but silently, as if the words she wanted to speak would not come; then she said, in a whisper that was almost audible:

"You will not tell her?"

He raised his eyebrows, and regarded her with faint surprise, as if he pretended that he did not understand her.

"Tell her? My dear lady, what is there to tell Miss Bourne?"

Her lips quivered, and she plucked at them, with a shaking hand, her eyes fixed imploringly on his.

He shook his head at her rebukingly.

"My dear Mrs. Burton, let the dead past bury its dead. Why should you and I disinter it? Not only shall I not tell this charming and beautiful girl that which you and I know, but I shall forget it. I have done so already. Let me advise you to do the same. We shall only be following the example of the world. Everything is forgotten. Tell her! It would be worse than cruel—it would be foolish. We lawyers are obliged to be cruel, but, believe me, we are never fools—if we can help it. You have found your glove, Mrs. Burton? Right! Then come along. Sorry to keep you waiting, my dear Miss Bourne. Your aunt dropped her glove. What lovely weather! The sun is shining on you, my dear young lady! May it long continue to shine!"

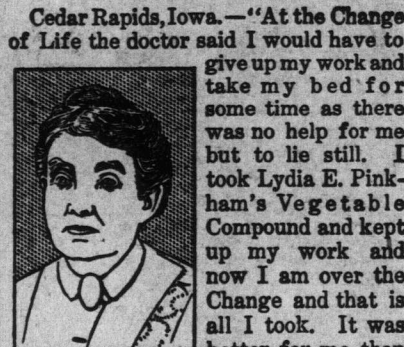
CHAPTER IV.

Dalesford rode home quite quietly—for him; and much to the surprise of Jess, who was accustomed to going hard when her master was on her back, especially at night.

A groom came across the stable yard to take the horse, and Dalesford signed to him to lead the mare under the lamp, and passed his hands over her forehead. There was a bruise on

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her shoulder, and Dalesford pointed to it, and bade the groom bathe it.

"A fall, my lord?" asked the man, looking up at his lordship's stained forehead—the bandage had long ago been transferred to Dalesford's pocket—whether a spot or two of blood was showing.

Gurdon, his man, was waiting for him, and as he took his master's hat, at once saw the wound. But he was too well trained to make any remark, or to ask any questions; and, having valeted Dalesford, respectfully bade his lordship "Good night." Dalesford responded courteously, but absently, and as the man reached the door, called him back.

"I met with an accident this evening, Gurdon," he said. "Call me a little later, will you? And, Gurdon, there is no need to mention it, please."

"Certainly, my lord," responded Gurdon, with a slight air of surprise, as if the injunction was quite unnecessary.

After he had gone, Dalesford lit a cigar, sank into an easy chair, and smoked and thought hard.

"I suppose that fellow would have settled me if she had not come up," he said to himself. "A plucky girl. He very nearly struck her, the hound!—and beautiful, too, I think—I wish I could have seen her face distinctly—a musical voice—a lady, evidently. What's she doing in that cottage? Ah, yes, the school cottage. That is, it, of course. She is the schoolmistress. I should like to see her again. I wonder what her name is."

He took the handkerchief from his pocket, and examined it. There was the faint trace of some initials, which

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had been partly erased by the demon washerwoman.

"I'll ask—I must call—"

His pale face colored, and he frowned, for it had suddenly occurred to him that to meditate a flirtation with this girl, who had, in all probability, saved his life, was a mean way of requiting her heroism. The kindest thing he could do would be to refrain from intruding upon her; the world does not approve of friendship between the heirs to earldoms and young and beautiful schoolmistresses.

It was an unusually virtuous resolution for Dalesford, and he registered it with a certain amount of reluctance, for Diana's face and voice haunted him pleasantly and invitingly. He went to bed, at last, and slept the sleep which comes so readily to him of the sound constitution; but, when he was awakened in the morning by Gurdon, he was annoyed to find that his face was disfigured by a bruise across the temple, and that the edges of the wound had swollen.

Gurdon respectfully suggested the doctor; but Dalesford laughed.

"Nonsense! You used to be rather good at black eyes and cuts, Gurdon; surely, you can cope with this!"

"Yes, my lord; but that was—your lordship wasn't—was younger then," he said, as he did his best with warm water and court-plaster.

"The earl's compliments, my lord, and will your lordship breakfast with him?"

Dalesford nodded. "All right. Half an hour."

In half an hour, he sauntered down the corridor, and was admitted by a footman to the earl's own rooms, a luxurious suite, which overlooked the terrace, lawns, and park. The earl was leaning back in a chair at the breakfast-table, his thin, upright figure wrapped in a dressing-gown of rose-du-barri satin, his white hand turning over his letters.

He raised his brilliant eyes—they shone like onyx—as his son entered; and, as his eyes rested on the bruised forehead, the delicately dark brows went up slightly, but he said, with his ordinary expression of bland serenity, and with a cheerful nod:

"Good morning, Vane! Good of you to take compassion on my solitude. Fine morning, isn't it? Have you seen the paper? Red Pepper is scratched. Did you back her? Ah, yes; so did I. Fish, Benson. Thanks! Don't wait."

When Benson and the footman had gone, the earl, without raising his eyes, said, in a smooth voice:

"Late last night, Vane?"

"Yes, rather, sir," replied Vane. "Had a fall." He knew that he would have to volunteer an explanation, that his father was far too courtly to ask for one.

"Not a bad one, I trust?" said the earl, sympathetically, feeling free now to raise his eyes, and look, but not too keenly or curiously, at the bruised forehead.

"Oh, no; mere nothing," said Dalesford casually.

"No? I am glad. All the same, I think we will postpone the dinner-party until to-morrow. May I look at my letters? You have yours, I see."

Vane nodded, and took up one or two; they were mostly bills and reminders, more or less gentle, that they were overdue.

"Same as mine, I suppose," said the earl, with a smile and shrug of his shoulders. "They should pass a short act making it a criminal offence to send in an account more than twice in twelve months. But Parliament never does anything that is really useful. By the way, talking of bills—most unpleasant and incongruous subject for a charming morning!—Starkey wants to see you—very badly. I think, judging by his manner."

Mr. Starkey was the earl's steward and business man, the unfortunate gentleman who spent his days in an attempt to manage the family affairs.

(To be Continued.)

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