

MAGIC READ THE BAKING LABEL
NO ALUM POWDER

Only a Beggar;

A Queen Among Women

CHAPTER X.

This latest visitor was a middle-aged man, with a face that belonged to that of the laboring class. The mouth was coarsely cut, the brows heavy, the eyes evasive, half-cunning, half-timid. His thick-set figure was like his face, that of the lower middle class, and he was dressed in a respectable fashion enough, but quite unlike most of the fashionable men present. In short, the man might have been taken for a well-to-do tradesman from the provinces, or a pilot, who had exchanged his rough overalls and pea-jacket for his best suit. A commonplace man enough, so commonplace that, though several looked up at his entrance, no one gave him a second glance—not even Desmond March, who slyly kept his eyes on his cards.

The man stood for a moment looking round, as if he were renewing his familiarity with the scene; then he went, with the heavy step of the man who has known physical toil, to the counter for a drink, and, after drinking it slowly, loitered, exchanging a banter, as heavy as his gait with the woman at the bar; then seemed about to leave.

But he hesitated, and presently gravitated to the table where Desmond and the lad were playing.

As he did so, as his eyes fell on Desmond March, he started, his face paled, and he turned quickly, as if about to go.

But Desmond March, without taking his eyes off his cards, and without raising or changing the voice in which he had been speaking, said, slowly:

"No; don't go. I know you. Wait till I've done here. I want to speak to you."

The man stood, biting his thick lips, and looking, with a frown, at the handsome face, with its eyes still fixed on the cards, and seemed to hesitate, but once again the smooth voice said:

"I know you—knew you the moment you came in. Wait. Your play, Wally!"

The man hesitated a moment, then he went slowly to a chair, dropped into it, and sat staring uneasily at the door, as if he would have escaped even then, if he had dared.

CHAPTER XI.

Desmond March did not hurry his game, did not even glance at the thick-set, commonplace man, who leaned back in the chair, and, with a poor attempt at ease and nonchalance, waited Mr. March's pleasure.

Desmond March and his piece played until the latter could no longer see the cards; in fact, collapsed, and fell across the table; then March leisurely put the I.O.U.'s the lad had given him into a pocket-book, and, dragging Lord Wally to his feet, administered a big glass of soda-water and led him from the room. As they passed the man in the chair, March, without looking at him, said cheerfully:

"Back directly."

Having put the lad into a cab, and



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told the driver, the address—"better take him for a little round first, cabby," he said pleasantly. "Here's a sovereign for your fare. Look after him!"—March went back to the room, and, beckoning to the man, signed to him to take the chair Wally had vacated.

"What will you drink?" he asked. "I'm not drinking anything," replied the man sullenly. "I've stayed because you asked me to; but I don't know you, sir, and I don't know what business you can have with me."

Desmond March nodded to one of the waiters.

"Bring some whiskey—out of Mr. Moss's own bottle, please!—and some soda-water," he said; then he handed his cigar-case to the man opposite him, and carefully lit a cigar for himself. There was in the action so plain an indication of conscious power, of superiority, that the man, as if hypnotized, lit a cigar, and took the drink the waiter placed before him.

"You don't know me?" said Desmond March, leaning forward, and eyeing his companion with a smile of sardonic enjoyment. "My name is March. Recall anything?"

The man shook his head. "Oh, come!" remonstrated March, with a shake of his head. "You knew me the moment you came up to the table, and you were going to bolt, if I hadn't stopped you. A bad memory is a great drawback; I've always felt that, and cultivated mine. For instance, I can go back twelve years—yes, it's twelve years ago—and recall a very pleasant visit I made to a friend who held an official position under government; in fact, he was the governor of Portland convict prison—"

The man had his glass half-way to his lips, but he arrested the action, and put the glass down. His ruddy face paled, his thick brows came down, and his lips drew together; but he said nothing, and kept his eyes fixed on the handsome, smiling face opposite him.

"A very interesting visit it was," Desmond March went on, in a ruminating fashion, as if he were pleasantly recalling the time. "Of course, I went over the prison, and saw a great deal of the convicts. There's always a peculiar, gruesome charm about prison life—to the spectator; just as there is about the morgue and the scaffold. Ever seen a man hanged? I have—got in with a press ticket. It's interesting. That cigar doesn't draw, I'm afraid. Take another!"

The man ignored the offer, and Desmond March resumed:

"One night the whole place was in a state of excitement; usual cause—a convict had escaped. All the warders—guards, do you call them?—were up in arms, the alarm bell was rung, and the hue and cry was out in hot pursuit. The man had stunned a warder, got into the yard, and skinned up a pole—they were repairing a roof, or something—to the outer wall. His name was Garling, and he was one of the model prisoners, and had earned ever so many good-conduct marks; but he had been playing the saint with an object, and was the last man likely to be suspected of attempting to escape. It looked as if he would get clear off, for the pursuit was at a loss for a couple of days; but on the third, if I remember rightly, they found him, half starved, behind a hayrick. Another drink?"

He ordered it, but the man took no notice of it when it was brought, and still kept his eyes fixed on March's smiling ones.

"I was present when the fellow was brought in. Poor devil! He had had a rough time of it! He was covered with mud and blood—one of the guards had been obliged to club him over the head, for, weak as he was, he had put up a fight for it. His clothes were torn, the skin hanging to the palms of his hands in shreds, and he was half dead with exhaustion and disappointment. I had a good look at him, of course, and I shouldn't be likely to forget him, even if my memory wasn't as good as it is. I can see him now. There he is beside you!" he added, with a sharp change of tone.

The man turned his head, and saw himself reflected in a dingy pier-glass.

Desmond March laughed. "Besides, he had an identification mark—a scar on his left arm. Ex-

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"Now we've cleared the way, let us be comfortable, Mr. Garling," Desmond March said pleasantly. "Take your drink, light up another cigar, and—enjoy yourself. What on earth did you come here for?"

With a shrug of his broad shoulders, and a jerk of his head, Garling drank some whiskey, and lit a fresh cigar; then he leaned his elbows on the table, and regarded his tormentor, as if he expected some more questions, and he was not disappointed.

"Twelve years ago," said Desmond March, as if he were calculating, "you had two years to serve when you made a bolt for it. I remember, because they were surprised at your not waiting, seeing that your time was so nearly out. Why didn't you?"

Garling cleared his throat, and smiled grimly. "The last year, the last month, the last day, the worst to bear," he said. "And you had an extra term, or did they let you off easy?"

"They let me off—easy," said Garling, with dry irony.

"Let me see, what were you in for? Ah, yes, a little affair of a bank, and a safe. Why, of course! I remember. They used to call you the Ironmonger, because you were so good at negotiating safes and strong rooms. That was one of the interesting bits of information my friend the governor gave me. The Ironmonger. And it wasn't your first conviction. So they gave you your ticket, and you—now, pardon my curiosity, what did you do? Get into trouble again? Have you just come 'out'?"

He glanced at the man's thick, iron-gray hair, which was of the ordinary length. "Ah, no; I see that you have not been in the 'jug' lately. What has been your game, eh, Garling?"

Garling's lids dropped. Then he raised them, with a curious smile.

"If I was to tell you the truth, you wouldn't believe me," he said, and the smile broadened for a moment, then passed, and left his face grim again; but there was a strange, half-mocking expression in his eyes. "I daresay not," said Desmond March. "That's the worst of having a bad name; you lose your credit, and may as well be hanged at once, with the proverbial dog. Been abroad?"

"Yes; I have been abroad," said

Garling musingly. Then, suddenly, he said:

"And now let me ask you a question or two, Mr. March. I drop in here, just like any other man might do, for a drink, the public being shut, and I run against a person that remembers me, and spots me at once. That person is a gentleman, a regular swell—though he does pass the time rooking a boy. No offense, sir—"

"None at all!" responded Desmond March cheerfully. "My young friend wanted to play, and you can't disoblige a friend, you know."

Garling nodded indifferently. "It's no business of mine; but, what I'm asking myself, and what I want to ask you, is—what is your game?? Why couldn't you have let me come and go without interfering with me? You're a gentleman, Mr. March, a swell, and far above a common man like me; why did you want to pounce on me, and throw up in my teeth that I was once a lag; in short, what is your game sir?"

Desmond March stroked his mustache, and looked at the man through half-closed lids.

"You wouldn't believe me, if I said I had none, eh, Garling?"

"I certainly should not!" was the prompt assent.

"And yet it's the truth," said Desmond March, with a smile. "When I saw you coming in, and looking like a respectable tradesman, or an engineer in a good way of business, I wondered who you were, why you'd chosen to come to Moss's little den—the last place for a respectable tradesman, you know. Then, when I recognized my old friend, the convict who had so nearly escaped. I thought it might be rather amusing to have a chat with you. You see, I'm a student of human nature, and you must admit that you are a quaint bit of character."

"I see," said Garling, with tightening lips. "It was sheer wanton devilry, eh, sir?"

Desmond March shrugged his shoulders.

"Call it what you like, my friend. But—who knows?—I may want you some day."

"Want me?" The man echoed the words resentfully.

"Yes. I'm a gentleman, as you say; but I'm a gentleman who lives by his wits—as you have seen. Now, to one of my profession, a man of yours is sometimes useful. Oh, don't look so black, my dear fellow; I'm not at all likely to ask you to exercise your well known skill on a bank, or any other safe; but there may be several other ways in which you can be of service and it is pleasant to know that you can't refuse to serve me, if I require you to do so, and that the service will cost me nothing, or next to nothing."

Garling scowled at him watchfully. "You're making a mistake," he said, at last. "You've got no hold on me."

"No? Let us see. Now, my good Garling, you have only just returned to England from abroad. How do I know? By your hands and face, of course. We don't get that peculiar tan in London town, or in any other part of England. It was got under a southern sky, Garling; and it hasn't had time to wear off."

Garling knawed at his lips. "You've sharp eyes, Mr. March," he remarked.

"Didn't I tell you I lived by my wits?" retorted Desmond March. "Then, again, those clothes weren't made in England—they're foreign, or colonial. Right again? And now for one more guess. Shall I hazard the conjecture that you, though a 'ticket' man, haven't reported yourself to the police for a long, a very long time?"

Garling's lips twitched, and he glanced round the room apprehensively.

(To be Continued.)

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