



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

CHAPTER XXX.

"Desmond March!" she bit her lip to keep back the cry.  
"Desmond March," he said. "How did you find out that he had written to me? Mr. Fielding—Ah, yes! Clever fellow, Desmond! Nice cousin! I didn't think he'd go as far as this. And yet—he sighed—"he's a bad lot, Diana. But you have told no one?" he asked with a touch of anxiety. "No, no, of course not!"  
She shook her head. "No—I—I waited until I had seen you. I will do as you wish."

"Yes," he said with a smile. "From this time on, dearest, Diana, why did you leave me?"  
"Because—Hush!" she faltered. "There is not time, and—and I must not excite you."  
"All right," he said easily. "I can wait. It's enough for me that you have come back to me. How long the time has been! All right, nurse," he said with a smile, as she came up to them looking significantly at her watch. "Give me another minute. This young lady is going to marry me when you've turned me out warranted sound."

The blood rushed to Diana's face, and she fought with the mingled joy and misery in her heart; the joy of listening to his voice, of seeing his face; the misery that rose from the thought that she would soon hear and see him for the last time.

Something in his voice, at it hesitated and broke, touched the nurse, and, even while shaking her head, she drew back. He tried to rise on his elbow, but Diana stretched out her hand and laid it on his breast. He winced, then smiled up at her.

"I'll get up, right up, if you don't kiss me," he said, with a touch of fever in his eyes.

"What could she do? She bent and slowly let her lips touch his, her eyes streaming with tears. The nurse returned to the bedside with a stern resolve in her face.

"You must go now," she said. "I can't let you stay another minute, not one single moment!"

Diana, dropping her veil to hide her face, touched the nurse's hand gratefully and went out. As she was passing along the corridor she saw an old man approaching, leaning on the arm of a young girl. Diana drew back and slipped into a ward, and, waited, trembling, until they had gone on, for she had recognized in them the earl and Mabel.

Immediately Vane was strong enough the detective was at his bedside; but he was surprised, and not a little disappointed to find that his lordship could render him very little assistance toward the arrest of the assassin who had attacked him. It seemed that Lord Dalesford had no capacity for description, and no very clear idea of the kind of man his assailant was.

As he got better—but how slowly he progressed!—visitors came more frequently. The earl and Mabel lived only to count the hours they spent

away from him. The earl would sit and hold his son's thin, wasted hand, scarcely speaking, but every now and then turning his pathetic eyes on Vane, as if to assure himself of the improvement in his condition. And Mabel, though she was not so silent and told him the news with characteristic comments, looked at him with a vague questioning in her glance. But Vane held his tongue. It was not yet time to speak.

Lady Selina came frequently; but her chief desire was to get Vane to the house in Grosvenor Square, "to be nursed," as she put it, emphatically, ignoring the fact that he was being nursed with that absolute devotion and skill which can only be experienced at a hospital, with its staff of famous surgeons, and its band of self-sacrificing women, whose unselfish lives shine out like stars in this murky, selfish world of ours.

Of course Bertie came; and always came when Mabel was unaccompanied, and as invariably expressed surprise at seeing her. Vane would lie back and listen to them as they tried to hide their love-making under a mask of quarreling and arguing; a mask so palpably transparent that it made even the nurse laugh.

Diana's visits were carefully timed, so that she should not meet the others. As Vane got stronger, her manner gradually changed. With her joy in his recovery was mingled the sadness of the coming parting; it was like a dark shadow on the happiness of the last few fleeting weeks.

"I am going to get up to-morrow, dearest."

"If you are good," said the nurse sternly. "I mean if you will sit still and not insist upon walking about."

"Avaunt, tyrant!" retorted Vane. "Do you know, Di, that if she had her wicked will she'd keep me here for the next six months. I'm afraid she's fallen in love with me. Oh, nurse, think of that other poor young man who trusts you so entirely. Oh, yes, nurse, I love you very much; but, you see, I'm engaged, like yourself, so that, alas! it can't be."

The nurse laughed. "Lord Dalesford is the most impudent patient I have ever had," she said to Diana. "I don't envy you."

Diana tried to smile, but the tears came into her eyes as she turned her head away. Should she tell him today, tell him that she was not fit to be his wife, that though she was not the daughter of a convict, she was his niece; had lived on his money; was contaminated by his relationship? Not to-day. Let her have one more day. Her plans were made, her resolution irrevocable.

He felt her trembling more than usual at their parting that afternoon, and he looked with loving scrutiny into her eyes. But she slipped from his arms and left him without a word. Some time later that same day the nurse came into the room and, after a moment or two of watchful silence said:

"There is another visitor, Lord Dalesford. It is a man—he will not give his name—who says he wishes to see you on a matter of the greatest importance. I have been down to the hall to see him, and I think from his manner it is business of importance. Will you see him for a few minutes only, if I let him come up?"

"Let 'em all come!" said Vane cheerfully; another day or two and he would be out and able to "look after" Diana. Never again would he lose sight of her. It was of this he was thinking.

The nurse went down, and presently returned and ushered in the visitor.

"A quarter of an hour," she said, as she closed the door on them.

That night Diana, bending over Mrs. Burton, kissed her and said, in a low but firm voice:  
"Mother, we are leaving England the day after to-morrow. I have not told you before because—I was afraid of Mr. Fielding, of—of every one. But no one must try to stop me. We must go; we must!"  
Mrs. Burton inclined her head.



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"I understand, Diana," she faltered meekly. "I shall be ready."

CHAPTER XXXI.

Diana worked at her typewriting that night and early the next morning; for her money was running short and she had refused to accept any from Bourne.

But every now and then she looked up and gave her misery a breathing space; it was so hard to give up Vane, now that she had seen him again, had spent so many hours beside him—hours in which her love had been intensified by its very hopelessness.

She finished her batch of work and posted it on her way to the hospital. Vane was dressed, and his hat and coat lay on a chair, as if he were going out.

"Yes, dearest, they are going to throw me out!" he said with a laugh, as he drew her to him and seated himself beside her. "The carriage will be here directly, and we will go—"

She drew away from him and looked at him piteously.

"Not—not I, Vane!" she murmured. "I—I have come to say good-by. But I—I have something to tell you, something I must tell you before we part. You—you will be good to me, Vane, you will not try to keep me—make it harder to part from you!"

"Oh, I'll be good to you," he said gravely, but with the smile, the tender smile, of loving confidence still in his eyes. "What is this you are going to tell me?"

"The reason why I went away, why we must say good-by forever," she faltered, bravely trying to keep the tears from her eyes and voice.

"No, no, Diana; I know," he said very quietly.

She started and looked at him.

"You know?"

"Yes, I had a visitor after you left yesterday. His name is Benjamin Bourne."

Diana shrank back with a little cry; but Vane took her hand and held it tightly.

"He—he has been here—he has told you?" she panted.

"Yes; everything, Diana, if anything could make me love you better than I do—which isn't possible—the knowledge of all you have gone through would do so. And you could think—dream—of leaving me again? Oh, my dear, how could you?"

She looked at him with wonder and surprise.

"But—but I must!" she said in a low voice. "Vane, do you think I—love you?"

"I know it," he responded, "and the knowledge makes me the happiest and proudest of men, dearest."

"I should love you very little if I consented to drag you down to my depths," she said with a catch in her voice.

"What depths?" he asked calmly.

"I—I—am related, I belong to that man, Ah, I must not speak, think, unkindly of him! He was generous to me, Vane. I must not forget that!"

"You're not likely to. And why should you?" he asked as coolly as before. "Benjamin Bourne is a very good sort of man. By George! he's a man to admire; a man who went back on his past and trod it underfoot. Not many of us can do that, Diana; few of us could make such a sacrifice as

he made for the girl he thought his daughter."

She went white. "You—you don't know, Vane, that—that I found him at Glenaskel—trying to steal—"

"The diamonds? Oh, yes. He told me the whole story. I think he kept nothing back. Perhaps you don't know that he was driven back to the old path, to play the burglar, by my fine cousin, Desmond March. Yes; Desmond had a hold on him and used him—as Desmond March would use a man in his power, unmercifully, ruthlessly. Poor Bourne! I took to him. I could sympathize. His child—his real child—that poor girl! Desmond March again! There is a bad reckoning to be made up between the two men. I hope—his face and voice grew grave and apprehensive—"they may not meet. Bourne is leaving England—forever. Oh, he's a fine fellow. And how he must have suffered!"

Diana regarded him with wide-open eyes.

"A—A convict!" she said in a whisper.

Vane nodded coolly. "I know. But what has that to do with you and me, dearest?"

She was silent with amazement.

"He turns out to be not your father; but even if he had been, I shouldn't have given you up. But we won't discuss it," he broke off as the nurse entered the room.

"Carriage waiting, nurse? Right. Don't look so mighty glad to get rid of me. I may come back, you know. You see—with a glance at Diana—

"I've been so happy here; happier than I've been for weeks past."

"I hope you will take care of yourself, Lord Dalesford," said the nurse. "You must not take a chill, or do too much for some time. You have been a very good patient—at least"—checking herself, with a smile—"as good as could be expected for a man. Yes; take care of yourself."

"Thanks, very much; but here is a young lady who will save me the trouble. I'm going to be taken care of for the rest of my natural life. Good-by, nurse. I won't try and thank you."

Nor did Diana try; but she went back quickly and kissed the devoted nurse; and there were tears in the eyes of both women.

Dalesford found that he was not so strong on his pins—as he put it—as he expected; and he had to lean on Diana's arm; or said he was obliged to do so.

The carriage was waiting, and the footman and coachman touched their hats respectfully and eagerly, and regarded their young master with anxious and curious eyes.

As the carriage drove off Diana seemed to awake to the fact that she was being carried away.

"Where are we going?" she asked in a low voice, as they sat hand in hand; for how could she refuse to let him have her hand when he had only just come through the valley of the shadow of death, and was still weak?

"Home," he said. "The governor and Mabel were at the hospital just before you came; and I told them that I should bring you home to lunch."

"Oh, Vane, Vane!" she breathed with a long, wistful sigh and a shake of her head.

"You should have seen the governor's face. He is not given to shouting, as you know. Mabel did that for him. She screeched so that the nurse came running in and chucked them both out!"

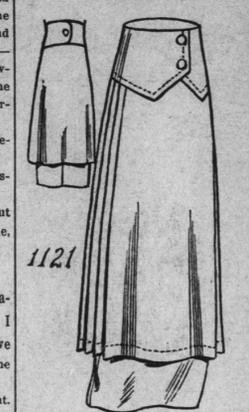
"And—and the earl? Oh, surely—surely, he will not be glad to see me, me!"

(To be Continued.)

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