



Only a Beggar;

BUT A Queen Among Women

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It was the deep voice of Donald, as he stood in front of the great stone steps at Glenaskel, his fingers on his beloved pipes, his gigantic figure drawn to its full height, his eyes, even as he addressed the throng of Highlandmen under his command, peering through the twilight toward the bend of the road along which the carriage, bringing Lord and Lady Dalesford to their Scottish home, might come in sight at any moment.

"Ye'll understand, laddies, ivery mon is to wave his cap and shout when the carriage reaches where I'm standing. An' ye'll not rush forward an' frighten the bonny young master's wife. I'll hev ivery mon mind his manners. But ye can shout an' ye can wave till—till all's blue!"

"Aye, aye, Donald!" came the response.

"And, mind ye, there's the laird and Miss Mabel hev got their een on ye from the hall window. Be gay, but canny, laddies!"

Strung up with excitement, the crowd responded again and swayed this way and that; their eager eyes fixed on the spot at which Donald was gazing.

In the hall the excitement was as great as that which prevailed outside. The earl, leaning on Mabel's arm, strove to look calm, and not at all impatient, but every now and then he glanced at the clock, even while he chided Mabel for doing the same.

"I've sent Bertie to the lodge gate," said Mabel. "They'll be sure to stop a moment to speak to the children. Diana couldn't pass them, you know, and he'll have time to run here and give us notice. Uncle Edward, if you tremble so, I will not let you wait here; you shall go into the drawing-room. Ah! what's that!"

"That" was Bertie skimming up the drive with the speed of the runner completing his last lap. Nodding excitedly to Donald's eager inquiry, he ran up the steps and burst into the hall, panting:

"They've come; they're at the lodge. Diana is talking to the children—"

"What did I tell you!" exclaimed Mabel, her bright eyes sparkling.

"She isn't to be trusted where children are about. Fancy being kept waiting by a parcel of kids!"

"Mabel!" murmured Lady Selina; but on this occasion was impervious to rebuke; indeed, there was no time

for expressions of regret and penitence, for suddenly the wild notes of the pipers broke out, and the carriage with its four white horses, with ribbons by their glossy faces, with heads erect, as if they shared in the general joy and were proud of their share, came round the corner.

Up went the caps, out rang the deafening cheers, and, alas, alas, for discipline! the ranks were broken and the great Highlandmen pressed forward to catch a sight of, if possible to touch, the bride and bridegroom.

The hall door had been flung open and the earl came forward, his hands already held out, his whole attitude eloquent of a loving welcome.

They all held their breath; Donald's notes of wild joy faltered for a moment, then broke out again with tenfold vigor as Vane, bareheaded, helped out the girl for love of whom every heart was beating high.

At sight of her, a little pale, but as radiant as Vane, the caps went up again, and the men crowded so closely that they scarcely left Vane room to lead her to his father. She took the trembling hands held out to her; then, with the tears filling her eyes, drew closer to him and kissed him.

It was Mabel's turn now, and she flung her arms round Diana and hugged her in true girlish fashion, scarcely yielding her to Lady Selina, who stood beside her ready with a warm, if a less enthusiastic, greeting.

"And here is Tubby, too!" said Diana, trying to strike a lighter note. She caught up the pug, who was yapping himself into a fit, and held him for a moment, then her hand stole into Vane's.

Once before she had been welcomed to Glenaskel; and she had then been able to thank them. Surely now a few words were due to them?

They seemed to know what was passing in her mind, for they were silent for a moment and pressed round the steps, gazing up at her eagerly. She opened her lips, but no sound would come, not a single word.

But silence is golden; and they understood, and the roar of cheers, the "God bless ye, my laddie!" showed that they appreciated her incapacity to thank them in words.

The house-party consisted of the family only, and the evening dress which Diana wore for the occasion was of black, and there were no diamonds; for, as it must be always in this checkered, transient life of ours, the shadow of death touched, though it did not darken, the sunshine of happiness. The ill-fated man who had taken the vengeance of Heaven into his own hands had died while working that vengeance upon his daughter's destroyer. And Mrs. Burton had passed peacefully away in Diana's arms.

(To be Continued.)

Plot That Failed;

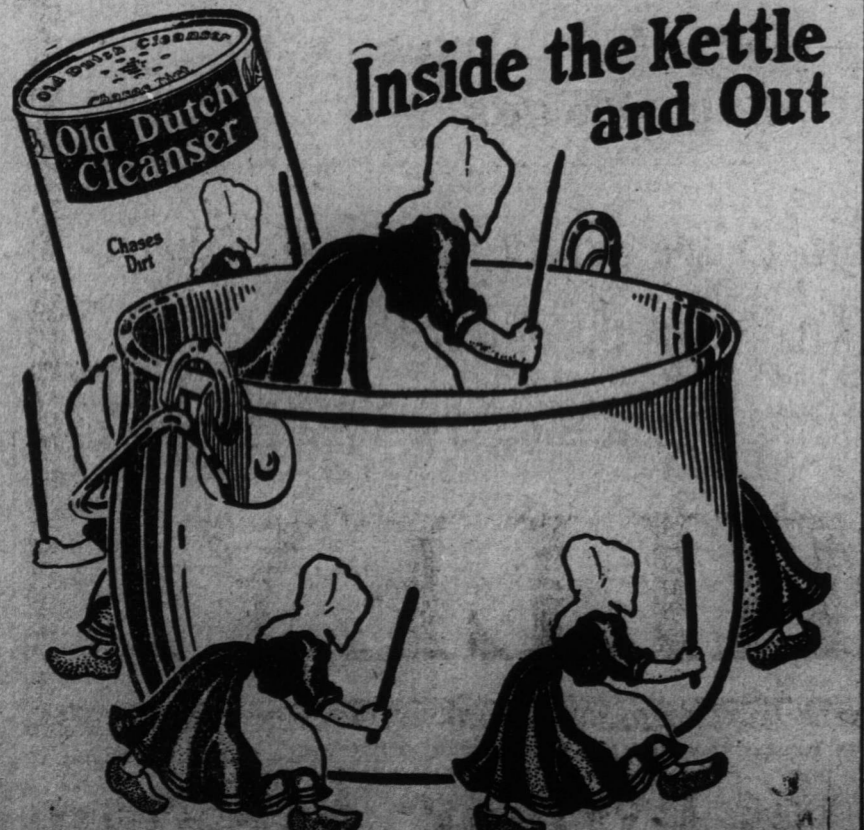
OR

Love That Would Not Be Denied.

CHAPTER I.

A warder leaps along the stones; No. 99 rises as if rested; No. 108 crawls like a serpent back to his proper gang.

Crash, crash, the last stone is lifted for to-night; the bell chimes the hour



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the gangs form with listless, weary sullenness into lines, stalwart warders, well armed, order them sternly to march. Another dreary, hopeless day of toil is done.

The sun has sunk, the red glow has left the sky, darkness has fallen upon the surging sea and barren shore.

The tramp of the sentinels can just be heard above the rattle of the falling beach. It is too dark to see them, but two figures are crawling under the beetling cliffs, they crawl hand in hand, fearful of losing each other for a moment. Not a word is spoken, their movement makes no sound. Five, ten, twenty minutes pass, and then they stop and draw long, husky gasps of relief.

"Yes," says one, "where are we?"

No. 99 shakes his head and peers into the darkness.

"Under the cliff," returns the other.

"Right under the guardhouse, I think, if so, far enough."

"Quite far enough, captain," is the hoarse reply. "And now we are here, what's the next move?"

The other remains silent for a moment, while he fumbles at his leg, then touches his breast and face.

"What's the matter, gov'nor, are you hurt?"

"A little," is the reply. "I'm bleeding like an ox."

No. 99 emits a grim, guttural laugh.

"There's enough of that with both on us," he says. "It's like our luck as the beast should turn. I thought you'd struck him straight, too, gov'nor."

"So did I," is the curt retort. "No matter; we are here and that's luck enough."

"But we can't stop here."

"We must till the tide's up, and it's coming now, half an hour and the fishing yaws will be in front of us."

His companion shudders.

"The fishing yaws!" he repeats.

"D'ye mean we're to swim for them, gov'nor, through this, in the pitch dark? Why, it's death!"

"Or freedom. Death! Jem, my man, you're worse than an idiot. What's the name you'll give to what we've left behind us? If that's life, we take death, Jem; and be thankful for it."

As he speaks, with a bitterness beyond description, he stoops and fumbles at his leg again. The sharp ears of his companion catch the grating of steel on iron.

"What's that, gov'nor?"

"A file," was the reply.

"Where did you get it from?" asks the other, with undisguised astonishment.

"I made it, Jem," replies his companion, quietly.

"What with?"

"An old piece of iron and my brains. It's a good one; try it for yourself."

As he speaks he shakes the horrible link of iron from his foot and passes the instrument to the other.

No. 99 takes it with a muttered oath.

"You're a wonderful man, captain, a wonderful man. There ain't nothing as you can't do—or won't do if we gets clear of this frightful torment. I'll be sworn, the game's all planned out a'ready."

"It is," replies the other, with quiet coolness.

The grating of the file stops for a moment.

"I thought so! S'help me, if I didn't! Might a humble pal, as has always stood by you, captain, ask what the move is? It 'ud pass the time away and keep the shivers off. There's a curse in the very air o' this place that cramps a man's heart and almost chokes him. Tell us the plot, captain. I'm yours, and you know it."

The captain looks into the darkness before him in silence for a moment; then, speaking in the whisper above which their voices had never for a moment been raised, he says:

"I'll tell you, Jem, as we swim together, as you say. We must, taking all things into consideration, and so—Jem, give me your hand."

The man he called Jem feels about in the darkness until his hard-grimed hand is clasped in the softer one of his companion, and waits silently.

"I'm going to take your oath," says the captain, coolly. "Swear that you will follow me faithfully—as, to give you your due, you always have done—right to the end of what is to come. Swear it, Jem, and I'll open up the game. You'll keep your oath, I know, because I'll swear at the same time that this hand of mine shall wring your neck if you break it. You swear?"

"I swear, captain!" replies Jem, hoarsely. "I've never played you false yet, captain. Would it pay me to do it now, after this little bout? Would it pay me, I asks yer?"

"No; now nor ever. Come closer; these cursed cliffs seem to me to have ears. Keep a look out all round. I'm watching for the lights of the fishing yaws."

"All right, captain," replies the other, eagerly. "Go on, if it's only for talking sake," and he shivers under the strain of long-sustained fear and excitement.

"You're right, Jem, I have a game on the board already. It wouldn't be me if I hadn't. It's a good game, too, and worth playing. Better than the last, which landed us here—not so risky, either. Did I ever tell you where I came from? No? Well, it isn't likely, when I come to think of it. I am not one of the communica-

tive sort. What do you say to India—Madras? I am a captain, Jem, by something more than courtesy. Captain Murpoint's a good enough name; and title, and they're my real ones. They'll do again, too."

For a moment he relapses into silence, his eyes scanning the sea before him. Then he takes up the thread again, in a tone rather of soliloquy than communication; but his companion, though apparently forgotten, listens eagerly.

(To be continued.)

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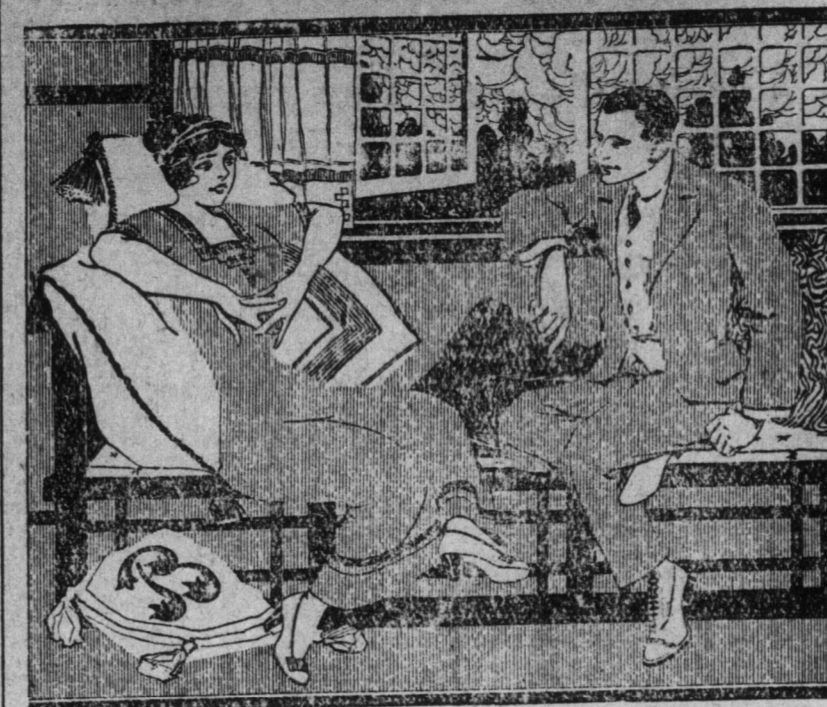
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