



Only a Beggar;

BUT A Queen Among Women

CHAPTER XXVIII.
"That's another question; and one that doesn't interest me," retorted Mabel. "Besides, you don't know what you may do—when you're a man."

Of course the sudden and complete disappearance of Diana was discussed in the servants' hall, and, though it was with bated breath and genuine sympathy that the servants talked over the matter, for Diana had won the hearts of every man and maid of the Wrayborough household, the subject was carried to the outside world; and by a natural coincidence it reached the ears of Miss Bangs—through her maid, who had a cousin at Wedbury.

Miss Bangs, whose breeding, unfortunately, was not equal to her wealth, encouraged her servants to gossip; and she listened with open ears—and mouth—to the story of Diana's flight; and an hour or two later, when Desmond March paid her one of his frequent visits, she said:

"Have you seen your cousin, Lord Dalesford, lately, dear?"

"Oh, yes," he replied with a smile and a shrug of his shoulders. "Saw him in town not long ago. He looked awfully seedy, and was walking with his eyes fixed on nothing, like a man in a dream. Oh, I'm afraid his appearance is not very hopeful for me—for us," he added quickly, to hide the thought that, in the event of Vane's death, Miss Bangs would have no cause to interest herself in his succession. "He's the sort of man to live to ninety—unless he breaks his neck by an accident." But he looks only the shadow of his former self, confound him."

"Perhaps he's fretting after his lady-love," suggested Miss Bangs, with a giggle.

Desmond March hated her when she giggled, but he pricked up his ears and asked her what she meant; and Miss Bangs retailed her maid's tittle-tattle.

"Quite a romance!" he said; and he went to the window and looked out with a gleam in his eyes. "So that's what he is looking for?" he said thoughtfully. "She's never been heard of, you say? Rather strange, isn't it?"

"Very," assented Miss Bangs, delighted at this display of interest by her fiancé, whom she usually found not easy to interest. "I wonder he doesn't set the police to work."

Desmond March smiled. It was not

worth while explaining to Miss Bangs that the Wrayboroughs were not in the habit of placing their private affairs in the hands of the police.

"Oh, he'll find her presently," he said. "Find her, and make it up and marry her—it would be just my luck."

He left the house soon afterward, and as he walked along, his lids drooped and the eyes behind them were sharp and hard, like those of a bird of prey. He was tired of Miss Bangs, whose infatuation for him had filled him with disgust—and made him, much to his annoyance, think of Lucy. If that love-sick cousin of his were only out of the way, he, Desmond March, would be saved from Miss Bangs. If he were only out of the way! The words kept repeating themselves at the back of his brain for the rest of the day; haunted him even while he was playing cards at the Apollo; and kept him awake as he lay at night staring into the darkness. Then suddenly March turned on the light and sprang out of bed and stood with white face and quivering lips as if he had seen or heard something that had filled him with terror.

The paroxysm passed quickly, and with a laugh he went to the spirit decanter and poured out some brandy.

"It's—It's madness!" he muttered as he set down the glass. "Sheer madness. And yet—and yet—if it could only be done!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

One morning Vane took up the post-bag and unlocked it and began to sort out the letters.

"They look uncommonly like bills, Mabel," he said as he handed her batch across. "Except this one. Bertie's handwriting. He's a good correspondent—he went to London only the day before yesterday."

Mabel colored up and affected to disregard the letter.

"You will not have long to wait," said Mr. Fielding. "I hope you will go and eat something; you look—"

Vane smiled gravely. "I trust at ten o'clock my troubles—and hers—will be over," he said significantly. "Yes; I will get something to eat. It is probable that you will see me tomorrow morning—both of us."

Mr. Fielding drew some papers toward him and bent over them; but he could not work; and at last he got up and, calling a cab, had himself driven to Alpha Street, the street in which Diana still lived.

He heard the click of the typewriter as Mrs. Burton opened the attic door to him. Both women were in mourning—poor Lucy had been buried three days ago—and both were looking worn and weary. Diana had rented a second room and Mrs. Burton presently went into it, leaving Diana and Mr. Fielding alone.

"How late you are working, my dear!" he said. "Is it necessary, is it generous?"

She shook her head as if she had answered the question before. "You want to see me? Is it about—Mr. Bourne? Have you seen him?" she asked in a low voice.

"No," he replied. "No; I have seen some one else—Lord Dalesford."

Diana looked up quickly, then her head went down.

"Is—is he well?" she asked in a faint voice.

"Well? Oh, yes. Better than he has been for some time—of course!" he answered.

She glanced up at the "of course." With a little nod at her, he said, rather sharply: "Why did you change your mind and write to him?"

He had considerably turned away to the fire, and he did not see the start and the flash of surprise in her eyes.

"I am leaving England, but I cannot do so without seeing you once again. I will be at the end of Spencer Street, by the river, at Chelsea, to-morrow night at ten o'clock; and will explain everything. Destroy this. D."

"It is strange," said Mr. Fielding, musingly.

"It is typed; the envelope also is typed," said Vane.

"Yes; so I see. There is a reason for that. Miss Diana has a typewriter. No, no; I cannot tell you any more! My lips are sealed. I can only ask you to wait until ten

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o'clock this evening. Please God the dark cloud that has hung over her young life and yours may be dispelled."

"God grant it!" said Vane. "For her sake I must respect her confidence in you. It is joy enough for me to know that she is alive—and well!"

Mr. Fielding shook his head. "Not another question, I beg, my lord!" he said.

Vane inclined his head. "Give me the letter," he said; "she bids me destroy it."

As he tore the paper across, Mr. Fielding made a motion as if to stop him, but checked himself; and Vane reduced the letter to fragments and dropped them on the fire.

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"And why, if you had decided to see him, did you not meet him at my office instead of making an appointment at the end of Spencer Street, and at night?"

A few months ago Diana would have exclaimed with amazement and repudiated any such appointment; but she had waded through the waters of a bitter experience; and she was on the alert, the defensive. She remained silent; and Mr. Fielding shrugged his shoulders.

"I see you do not mean to tell me. Ah, well, I am glad you have acted as you have. If you had seen Lord Dalesford, the joy, the hope, in his eyes, notwithstanding his suspense! But his suspense will be at an end at ten o'clock to-night!"

"To-night!" Diana's lips formed the words, and she glanced at the cheap clock on the mantel.

"Shall I go with you?" asked Mr. Fielding. "I think I ought to do so; to be near—if you should want me."

"No," she said in a low voice. "I will go alone. I wonder whether I shall ever be able to thank you for all you have done for me?"

"If you really feel any gratitude for my poor and quite inefficient services, my dear," he said promptly, "you will act on the advice I gave you when—when we discovered whose child you were, and at once make Lord Dalesford happy. He has suffered agonies through no fault of his own. There, there. Don't cry! I can't stand that, as you know. Go and meet him and let him bring you to me in the morning. Oh, my child, don't wreck a good man's life—to say nothing of your own—for a mistaken sense of honor. Honor! 'Pride' is the word. There, there! Sure you wouldn't like me to accompany you? It's a lonely spot you've chosen."

"No," she said again; "I will go alone."

When he had gone she sat and gazed at the fire, her heart beating painfully fast. By whom had the letter been written? She could think of no one but Bourne. Had he sent the letter with the intention of bringing her and Vane together again? Had he? It was impossible for her to conjecture the reason, solve the problem; but there was one thing plain to her. She must be at the place mentioned, even if she did not disclose her presence.

Vane walked to his club, and while the chop was being served, went into the library and got a "Postal Directory"; for in his excitement he had omitted to ask Mr. Fielding where Spencer Street was.

He forced himself to eat the chop, and drank a little wine; smoked a cigar afterward, and tried not to look at the clock or listen to its striking of the slow pacing hours.

At last it was time he started! He sprang up with a flush on his face, his eyes shining, his heart beating fast. A footman helped him on with his coat, and as he gave him his hat said:

"A cab, my lord?"

(To be continued.)

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