



Only a Beggar;

A Queen Among Women

CHAPTER XXVI.

His face cleared a little. "I'll see to it," he said. "I'll get"—then his brow darkened—"no, I can't be seen on it," he said moodily. "I'm in hiding. I only go out at night—living in a quiet place in the slums over there"—he jerked his thick thumb over his shoulder in the direction of Lambeth. "In hiding from that—that man I told you of, the man who forced me to try for the diamonds. Well, well!" as he saw Diana shudder. "We'll forget that. Ah, no, you can't. I know. And no more can I! That's the worst of it between you and me, my gel; there's no forgetting! And you're livin' here like a pauper, left all your friends—half fed, badly clothed—"

He broke off with a groan, and, sinking on to a chair, hid his face in his hands. Diana wanted to comfort him, but she could find no words, could not force herself to lay her hand on his shoulder as she wanted to do. He was her father, but she still shrank from him, still inwardly shuddered at the sight of his face, the sound of his voice. She could only look at him and try to accustom herself to his presence.

Presently the sick girl moved uneasily, turned and opened her eyes. "I am still here," she said faintly. "How good you are to me! I've seen you before. Yes, I remember. But for you I should have been lying dead in the river there. Oh! why did you save me? I wanted to die. I had nothing to live for, nothing, nothing!" Diana quivered. How often had that cry been hers?

"Hush!" she whispered. "There is always something to live for, dear!" "Not for me," moaned Lucy, turning her head away. "I am not fit to live. I will go home." She raised herself on her elbow; but Diana gently forced her back again.

"Not yet," she said softly. "You will stay here with me until you are better, stronger. I shall be glad, very glad to have you, for I am all alone." "Who is that?" asked Lucy fearfully, as she caught sight of Garling. "My—my father," said Diana with a choking sensation. "He—he helped me bring you here. There is no need to be frightened, dear."

"I will go home," said Lucy faintly; then she sobbed out: "Home! I haven't any! They—they turned me out—I had no money, not a penny—I've slept in the streets for—for ever so many nights—her voice broke and she clung to Diana with the terror of the homeless.

Diana soothed her as one soothes a child; indeed, she seemed more child than woman. "Hush, hush! You are here safe and in good keeping."

"Good—good!" The white lips caught up the word. "Ah, you don't know! I'm not good! I'm not fit for you to touch. Let me go!"

She began to struggle, and Diana, half frightened, turned to Garling; but as he came to the bed, the fragile figure ceased to struggle and fell back.

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"I'm hot—and I was cold a little while ago," Lucy panted. "Hot! So hot! I'm burning!"

"Fever!" said Garling. Diana nodded. "A doctor?" He bit his lip and hesitated. "Better not; not yet. Wait a little while. Hush, listen! She's raving, poor girl. Yes; I'll get a doctor."

As he turned, Lucy's voice, at first incoherent, grew clearer, and, extending her hands imploringly, she cried, in a piteous, heartrending tone:

"Don't leave me, don't desert me. Oh, keep your promise, dear! You loved me once. I'm not altered. I'm the same, and I love you, dear, oh! I love you; take me away with you, and—and make me your wife! You promised, promised faithfully; and I've waited, waited so long! Ah, don't be cruel to me, don't desert me!"

There was a pause; then suddenly her arms fell to her side, her head sank, and with a deep sob she wailed: "He's gone. He will never come back; he's tired of me. Oh! I knew it from the first. God help me! He has gone!"

Garling looked at Diana, and Diana turned her head away and sighed. "Some scoundrel," said Garling hoarsely. "I'd—I'd like to have him here! She's very bad. I'll fetch a doctor."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Garling came back quickly with the doctor, who stood and looked at the delirious Lucy with pursed lips and the keen eyes of a man who has to diagnose more cases in a day than the ordinary practitioner sees in a week.

"Brain-fever, following on shock to a system completely run down by—yes, I should say want of food and exposure to the cold and wet." He gave the necessary directions; then, as he edged toward the door and his next patient, he said, in answer to Diana's anxious inquiry: "Will she pull through? Ahem, shouldn't like to say. All depends upon how thin the metal has worn; and it has worn pretty thin I'm afraid. Good-by. Look in to-morrow."

Lucy raved for some hours, then sank into the coma of insensibility; and Diana sat beside her and held her hot, wasted hand. The fact that the girl had been betrayed had in no wise dried up Diana's pity and charity; indeed, it had increased her pity and made her desire still more keenly to help the victim of a man's selfishness and cruelty. Diana had seen too much of the world of late to turn from a fellow woman who had erred for love's sake; and she was now too skilled a student of the human face divine not to know that, wronged though she might have been, the girl was still pure at heart.

In the morning Garling came round from his hiding-place in the neighborhood. He had brought ice, and wine, and delicacies suitable for an invalid, and hung over the bed examining the flushed face eagerly.

"If there's anything that can be done—if there's anything money can get, tell the doctor to mention it, only mention it," he said with sudden eagerness. "I've set my heart on saving her. Poor little thing! And you, Diana; you aren't going to turn from me, and refuse the things my money can buy?" he pleaded. "I tell you, I swear to you, it was come honestly by. When she's better you'll leave this place," he looked round almost savagely, "and let me make life comfortable for you?"

Diana was spared a response; for, fortunately for her, the invalid moved uneasily; and Diana went to her. The doctor came again, but still declined to give any opinion; though Garling pressed him hard and offered him a fee, which made the doctor suspicious. But he had too many of the criminal class among his patients to attach much importance to the character of this rough, brusque man, and pocketed the fee without question or comment.

Garling came in and out during the day, and, after looking at the sick girl, sat beside the fire, brooding. "When she gets better she shall go away to the seaside. Wrong time of the year? Not for the South. We can take her. I forgot; you wouldn't come, not with me."

"Yes; you forget," said Diana in a low voice. "I offered to go with you." "I know, I know," he assented hoarsely. "You did, but—I saw your



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face. And you know what I am; she doesn't!" he jerked his head toward the bed. "And she needn't know. I'll take care of her as if—as if she was you." He was silent a moment or two, then he said, more to himself than to Diana: "The man—I want to meet him. Yes, and I may some time."

After one of his long silences, he said, suddenly:

"Where's your Aunt Mary?" Diana shook her head. "I do not know. I have not heard."

"I understand. You've hid away from everybody because you're ashamed of me. And you're too proud to take a penny, a mouthful of food from me. But you're right, my gel! Pity I didn't die instead of Brown. Pity!"

He said, "Good night!" soon afterward and went out. At the end of the street he stopped and looked round him restlessly and wistfully. The silence and solitude of the den in which he was hiding were to be shunned as long as possible; instead of going home he went up the road and past the House of Parliament. The Policeman, little guessing the true character of the man he was aiding, stopped the traffic so that he might cross the road. Among the vehicles was a hansom cab with a gentleman inside, who was leaning forward and regarding the passers-by absentmindedly, but as his glance rested on Garling, his eyes opened with a quick light in them, and, putting up the trap-door in the roof, he said swiftly:

"Follow that man there—the short one. See?"

"Right!" said the cabman, and he turned up toward the park after Garling.

Presently the gentleman alighted, told the cabman to wait, and stepping quietly up to Garling, laid a hand on his shoulder, saying quite calmly and pleasantly:

"How do you do, Bourne?" Garling started, and, turning with a swift movement, raised his hand, as if about to strike; but the gentleman seized the hand and shook it, as if it had been offered for the purpose.

"Mr. Fielding!" gasped Garling, hoarsely.

"Splendid memory yours; almost as good as mine," responded Mr. Fielding, with a nod. "Strange, meeting you here. Are you busy, engaged? If not, perhaps you will come to my office and have a chat."

Garling, with a look of resignation in his working face, made no refusal, and Mr. Fielding, linking his arm in his, led him to the cab. The clerks were gone, the office in darkness, but Mr. Fielding let himself in, lit the gas, and waved Garling to the chair on which Diana had sat.

"And how are you, Bourne?" he asked.

Garling eyed him stoically, and with a touch of resentment mixed with awe.

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"You knew I was alive?" he said sullenly.

"Not exactly 'knew,'" confessed Mr. Fielding, with a touch of regret and self-reproach. "I only guessed, surmised. Why should your daughter run away and hide herself unless she had heard you were alive or seen you? And that partnership business was—thin. It was merely conjecture by deduction. Understand? And how is Miss Diana?"

"She is—How do you know I've seen her—know where she is?" Garling demanded.

"Well, I know now, if I didn't a moment before," said Mr. Fielding with a grave smile. "Poor girl! Is she well—safe and well? I ask for personal reasons, Bourne, for I am fond of her; and I've suffered not a little remorse on her account. You see, I'm the cause of all the trouble."

"You? You mean me?" Fielding shook his head. "No; you couldn't help not dying; and though I think you might have refrained from turning up again—"

"You're not a father," said Garling huskily. "You've never plied for a sight of your gel, the child you left."

"No, Oh, yes, I can make allowance for your paternal feelings, my good fellow. Troublesome things these same feelings. In your case they have ruined your daughter and wrecked her life."

"I know it," said Garling with a dry sob. "And you don't know all—how completely I've done it." He was thinking of Diana's discovery of him "at work" at Glenaskel. "What's to be done, Mr. Fielding? You'll help me? You always have."

Mr. Fielding shrugged his shoulders. "Afraid I can't help you here," he said with genuine regret. "I tried to play amateur Providence once, and I've made a mess of it. Of course I ought to have told Lord Dalesford of Diana's—or—parentage before they became engaged."

Garling started. "Do you mean to say that she was going to marry—a nobleman, a swell?"

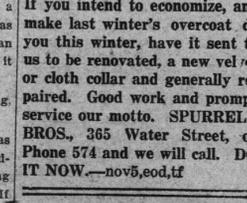
Mr. Fielding nodded. "Yes. The only son of the Earl of Wrayborough. She would have been a countess if you had not—or—inconveniently come to life again."

Garling wiped the sweat from his face. "And—and—you kept it from them?"

"Yes," said Mr. Fielding, shrugging his shoulders again. "I thought that it would be safe to do so; I thought—no, I didn't think of anything but Miss Diana's happiness," he broke off with fierce self-reproach. "I laid the flattering union to my soul that the secret of your—past was buried with you, and that if it leaked out after her marriage it would not matter. I was wrong, of course; both Mrs. Burton and I were wrong."

(To be continued.)

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- Baggs, Mrs. James, Church Hill
- Barnes, Miss May, care Mrs. Sterling, Gower St.
- Bradley, J. J.
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- Bailey, Mrs. Wm., Duckworth St.
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- Brennan, Jeremiah
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- Bonla, Francis
- Brown, Margaret, New Gower St.
- Butt, Mrs. Emma, Hayward's Avenue
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- Butler, W. J.
- Butler, John, care Gen'l Delivery
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- Cheffey, Miss L. B., care Monroe & Co.
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- Collins, W. H., Cuddily St.
- Cole, George, Windsor Hotel
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- Dewling, Richard, LeMarchant Road
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- Hackett, Mrs. Lawrence, Queen's Rd.
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