

Only a Beggar;

A Queen Among Women

CHAPTER XXXII.

"Means to keep his mouth shut! No scandals! Quite right, my dear cousin. I wonder if that madman is still there? I can't afford to appear in a fracas, a struggle in the public streets, with a lunatic convict. Better clear out again for a time. Yes; I'll go back to that infernal Brussels. I'll lie low for a bit."

He went into his dressing-room and changed his evening clothes for a travelling suit, and, with the collar of his ulster turned up as far as it would go and his traveling cap dragged down to meet it, went down the stairs, opened the door, and cautiously looked out.

Garling was not in sight; and with a sense of relief which enraged him, he called a cab and was driven to Liverpool Street.

He was in time to catch the Harwich boat-train, and he hung back watching the few passengers until they had gone from the station to the quay. Garling was not among them. On board the boat Desmond March went stealthily to a point from which he could scan his fellow-passengers; but he saw no sign of the square, shrunken figure, the livid face and blood-shot, menacing eyes.

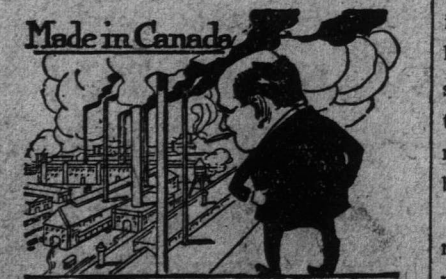
There was a fog on the Scheid, and the boat moved slowly, sounding the fog-horn continually.

The fog was still thick when the steamer reached Antwerp. The day had turned to night; the electric light made the darkness denser at places untouched by the lamps, and Desmond March, as he stood leaning over the deck-rail, peered into these black spots with a vague apprehension creeping on him. He was almost the last of the passengers to land, and he was passing to the train which stood waiting, when he saw a figure move slowly down the gangway and stand on the quay.

It was Garling—Garling with no attempt at concealment in his dress, no upturned collar or screening cap. Desmond March stood for a moment as if uncertain what to do; then he stepped out of the rays of the electric light into the shadow. Useless to go aboard the train with this madman as a fellow passenger. He would wait where he was until the train had gone and then—ah, well, he had meant to go to Brussels and thence to one of the small, out-of-the-way Belgian towns; but he could remain in Antwerp or—return to London.

He stood—he was ashamed to crouch—behind a high pile of bales, and heard the train start. He remained in hiding for another minute, then he stole out.

Garling was waiting for him on the other side of the bales.



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Desmond March opened his lips to cry out, but checked himself, for Garling did not attack him; simply stood with his hands in his pockets, his eyes blazing redly in his impassive face.

"Curse you!" gasped March. "Why do you follow me? What do you want? Come a step nearer and I'll call the police; there are a dozen here. Yes, by Heaven, I'll stop your little game; you're carrying this mad freak of yours too far."

Still not a word, not a movement of the menacing eyes.

As Desmond March moved toward the quay, the officials turned out some of the lights; the passengers had gone, and the place seemed deserted. Confused by the sudden darkness where a moment before there had been at least partial light, Desmond March blundered uncertainly forward.

The next instant an arm was thrown round his neck and across his mouth; he was borne to the ground with an irresistible force, and Garling's knee was on his breast. Desmond March could not see the face above him, but he could feel the hot breath, could almost feel the savage eyes. He could not speak, for the huge hand was upon his lips, forcing them out of shape, driving them against his teeth.

"At last," said the impassive voice. "We're at our reckoning, Mr. March. You want to know what I've got against you? I'm going to tell you. I've been waiting to tell you. Oh, I could wait. I'm used to it. I've learned patience in a hard school. And you don't guess why I'm going to kill you? That's—strange; yes, that's strange! You don't think of her—not for a minute, not you! What's just one girl to you! You won't care when I tell you that she's dead. What's it matter to you whether Lucy Edgeworth lived or died; you'd done with her, hadn't you? Well, she's dead. She flung herself over a bridge into the river. It's a pity there wasn't an end of her there, aptly for you that I picked her out and brought her home to die. A pity, because, you see, I'm her father."

Frantic with terror, Desmond March struggled; but as vainly as if the knees that pressed on him were a ton of steel.

"Her father. Strange, isn't it?" said Garling, not jeeringly, but almost solemnly and with the terrible calmness of insanity. "Her father. And me a rich man, too. Worth a million. And she'd have had it, if I'd known she was my child in time to save her. And you'd have had the money you'd sell your soul for, you—murderer. Pity, eh? If you'd only known!"

He paused and looked down at the face—now stained with purple patches—beneath him, looked down almost absently.

"That's what we've got to reckon up, Mr. March. My girl's ruin and—murder. For you killed her, you know. For myself—I'd cry quits, though you drove me hard, Mr. March; very hard. But my girl, my innocent, pure-hearted girl! Ah!"

The roughly hewn mouth opened, the fangs shone whitely in the murkiness, the huge hand was raised—and fell. Fell with such deadly force that it spurred the shrinking soul in the quivering body to one great, super-human effort. Incredible as it seems, Desmond March freed himself from the horrible incubus of the downpressing, life-crushing knees, and he struggled to his feet. He would have screamed for help, but his throat was too parched for any sound saving a gasping sob to issue from it; but he writhed and flung up his arm in impotent rage and fury, the blood streaming from his battered face and severed lips.

With a snarl, the guttural cry of the insane, Garling closed on him, lifted him bodily, as if he were a bundle of straw, and edging nearer and nearer the brink of the quay, poised for a moment, then plunged over with his burden into the dark waters below.

When the bodies were found—almost side by side—the face of Desmond March was unrecognizable; that of Garling calm and peaceful, as if he had passed to death from sleep.

(To be Continued.)

There is no doubt that the flaring skirt is here; if the fare is not at the knees it is at the hem.

Sand and putty are, if anything, increasing in favor, and are charmingly trimmed with skunk fur.

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Plot That Failed;

Love That Would Not Be Denied.

CHAPTER I.

It is sunset; a dusky red is spreading out from the horizon and throwing a dusky reflection upon the sullen sea and its more sullen shore. A weird, awful shore it is, encumbered with huge rocks and strangely hewn stone.

A grim, shuddering waste, made grimmer and more terrible by strange stray specks of humanity, that, seen in the falling sunlight seemed rather distorted creations of fancy than actual human beings; from stone to stone they pace, stepping with a peculiar, halting, laborious gait, and looking sullenly earthward as if their eyes were chained to the hateful, barren shore and the looking upward were death.

Look closer and gain fresh cause for wonderment. There is a strange likeness in these dim figures. They move alike, their gaze is directed sullenly downward alike, they are dressed alike. A sad, dingy, gray garment, half shirt, half tunic, relieved in all cases by a patch of crimson across the arm, upon which is stamped, in letters of black relief, a number. Their feet are shod with thick, heavy, iron-soled boots; a coarse, hideous cap is upon their heads, and the hair beneath it is cut almost to the skin.

The faces—ah, no! who could describe those faces? Who can speak of those crime-stamped brows, those passion-distorted lips, and those despairing eyes?

Listen! There is no sound but the sudden crash, crash of the falling stone that the coarse-grained hands are pushing, and the bent, gray-clad shoulders are heaving, from the quarries. One other sound still, heard only at intervals when the stone is silent, and that is the tramp, tramp of the sentries, who, like the figures of Death and Eternity in the old Roman temple, forever, day and night, march to and fro on the battlements, forever, night and day, keeping watch and

ward on the terrible, gray-clad figures, that despairingly toll upon the barren plain below.

It is the convict station at Portland, and the figures are the shadows of some of England's vilest criminals.

The sun sinks lower, the warders, stationed at measured intervals between the various gangs, yawn with weary impatience and long for the sound of the prison bell. When that rings, which it will do within half an hour, the gangs will have finished their work for the day and the march for the gloomy prison upon the heights will commence.

The warders yawn impatiently, but the silent, gray-clad figures feel no impatience. They have nothing to long for, nothing to hope for.

One and all toiling on this particular plain toll on till death, and that has been longed for so long that it seems so far off as to be hopeless.

Death comes to me free and happy, but them it seems to avoid; it leaves them to their most awful punishment of life.

The quarter has chimed, the warders have grown more impatient, perhaps less vigilant, or does this tall, thin figure with No. 108 stamped upon his arm only fancy so? For he has broken the rule which says that no man shall separate himself from his particular gang, and is crouching behind a boulder. Is he resting? His hazel, hunted eyes flash from the nearest warder to the sentinels upon the battlements. His hand grasps the chain at his leg to deaden its rattle as he glides along. His eyes drop from the sentinel and travel swiftly but keenly along the grim rank of the next gang. They rest upon one gray-clad figure numbered ninety-nine. His breath comes faster, he crouches until his breast touches the ground, and, though his lips are too tightly pressed for speech, his eyes seem to speak in the intensity of their gaze.

Perhaps number 99 feels their gaze, for as he stoops with the gang to heave the hard, cruel stone, he lifts his small, villainous eyes and sees the dark, piercing ones fixed so earnestly upon him. A start, imperceptible, thrills through him, and, as he raises his shoulder, he contrives to lift one hand as a signal that he has seen and understands.

No. 108 seems satisfied, he drops his eyes with a sigh, and waits with sullen impatience.

The stone is upheaved. The gang moves round and pauses to gain breath.

A few of the miserable figures drop upon the stones.

No. 99 flings himself sullenly upon the stone behind which crouches No. 108, and so effectually conceals the piercing eyes from the warder's catlike vigilance.

"Jem," says a low, hoarse voice from below the stone. "Can you hear me? Don't turn your head, and speak low."

"I hear," replies No. 99, with a hoarse voice.

"Jem, there's a chance; don't start or I'll kill you. There's a chance, but it wants working. I've been wanting to speak to you for six weeks. Warder No. 24 drinks like a fish. He'll be drunk to-night—to-night at seven. I've the stuff in the corridor. Our cells are opposite. He carries the keys in his breast pocket. At half-past seven to-night, Jem, he or I will be a dead man. You know me and my stroke. If I can get a clear blow with the iron jug and without noise we are free. Once in the corridor with the keys, we can gain this cursed cliff. Don't speak—he's looking this way! The tide comes in at ten; we must swim for it—go this minute, or we are lost."

(To be continued.)

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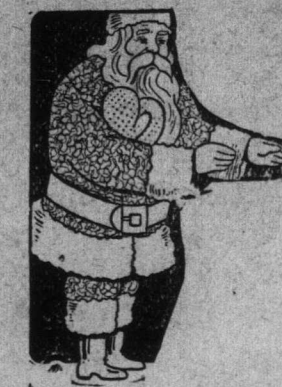
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