

# Beaton's Bargain.

BY MRS. ALEXANDER.

SYNOPSIS.

Mrs. Winington, Lady Mary Hay, Leslie Beaton and Jack Maxwell are members of London's smart society set. Beaton is Mrs. Winington's brother, and being poor resolves to answer an advertisement that promises to get him a rich wife. Lady Mary is a widow whom Beaton admires. Mrs. Winington and Maxwell were lovers before the former married.

CHAPTER II. (Continued.)

"A gentleman wants to know if you will see him, sir," said a waiter, presenting him with a card, on which was printed, "Leslie Beaton."

"Yes; show him up, and in a few minutes Beaton walked in.

"I was just thinking of looking you up," cried Maitland, shaking hands with him. "I have not seen anything of you since we supped together at Mrs. Winington's. I thought you would have come with me to hear Gladstone's answer to—"

"My dear fellow, I have been otherwise occupied," interrupted Beaton, with some solemnity, as he drew a chair opposite his friend.

Maitland looked at him, half amused at the mingled expression of triumph and meanness in his eyes.

"I have been very seriously occupied," repeated Beaton.

"What have you been about?"

"I have been securing a wife. I have been finding the means of existence."

"What do you mean?"

"You remember that advertisement?"

"Yes."

"Well, I answered it. Not the answer I concocted with Lady Mary. My proposal was entertained. I interviewed first the acting guardian a snuffy, shabby, shrewd old rascal, who has been making rigid inquiries respecting me, and my statements. I suppose the result has been so far satisfactory, that guardian number two received me yesterday, and we got on very well. He is a pompous old duffer, but a gentleman, and it is agreed I am to be introduced to the young lady to-morrow."

"But you are not in earnest? You would not select a wife in this fashion?"

"Why not? What is worse in it than being introduced by—say my sister—to an heiress with a view to matrimony? It is the same sort of operation more openly and satisfactorily conducted. I too have been looking into matters, and it is a bona fide ready-money affair. In short, I am inclined to think my luck has turned."

"And the young lady?"

Beaton made a grimace. "I haven't seen her yet, and I can only hope she is not too utterly ugly. If she is, why, I'll cry off. But, Jack, she has close on five thousand a year. That will cover a multitude of defects. Then there are many compensations even for the most devoted husband, and I intend to be a model. She shall spend a fair share of her own money as she likes, while I shall amuse myself my own way—in moderation."

"You are old enough to take care of yourself," said Maitland, proceeding to stamp the letters he had addressed. "I confess I feel most for the girl. I suppose she knows nothing about this precious scheme?"

"Hasn't the faintest suspicion. My dear fellow, she will be enchanted with me, if I choose; I always get on with women, and Miss Vivian (her name is Vivian) has been secluded all her seventeen or eighteen years. Her father was an enthusiastic naturalist, and had what he considered enough to live on the w—s evidently a man of limited ideas, so he

brought up this girl in the most naturalistic manner possible. I fancy the mother died years ago. Since the father's death my future spouse has lived in the paternal cottage, under the care of the snuffy guardian's sister, and I presume her manners are not of the highest tone. Quite lately she inherited a lot of money from an uncle who had not been on good terms with her father for years, but who died intestate. I have got Winington's solicitor to look into the matter, and he too says, it is a bona fide concern."

"There was a moment's silence.

"Why don't you congratulate me, Jack?"

"Perhaps I may later on; at present—well, I don't like the scheme; but I suppose I take things too seriously. I dare say a marriage of this kind is no worse than a large proportion of those which occur every day."

"On the contrary, it is a deuced deal better, less nonsense and more reality; you are quite too desperately in earnest—always were, so Jean says. By the way, she is quite taken up with my plan. Will you come with me and support me in this crisis of my fate?"

"Where?"

"At the Royal Academy to-morrow, one-thirty—to meet the object of my adoration. It's a beastly hour, but that's what old Tilly fixed. Tilly is the superior guardian, and is to introduce me as a 'young friend' to his ward and her chaperon. Really it will be rather fun for you to see the meeting."

"I will come," said Maitland, slowly.

"Where shall I find you?"

"Oh, pick me up at the club. Come and have a glass of sherry and a biscuit to keep up our spirits. You know, if the thing can be managed it will be a great chance for me. I am pretty well at the end of everything. Indeed, I must raise funds to carry out this scheme. I don't think even Winington will advance me a rap. Do you happen to have a few hundreds, Maitland, you would like to lend at high interest?"

"Certainly not," with a grim smile; "I like you too much, old fellow, to have any money transactions with you."

"Niggard!" cried Beaton, in mock heroic tones. "Well, I must try my old friends the Jews. In short, the only chance left me is this marriage. If it fails—but it must not fail. Now I have to escort Lady Mary to a garden party at Twickenham, so good-bye till to-morrow. Mind you don't fail me. You'll make a respectable sort of sponsor."

With a nod he left the room.

Maitland looked after his old playfellow with something of uneasiness and disapprobation. A she thought, "He is not to be trusted, I fear; none of them ever were except the old bird. I must see what the victim is like; probably she is an ordinary woman to whom a good name and a higher social position than her own may be all-sufficing."

The fateful morning was dull and heavy; but Maitland found Beaton in high, almost too high spirits, and faultless dress, with dainty gloves, and a delicate sprig of gardenia and maiden-hair fern in his buttonhole—"quite a bridegroom elect," as Maitland told him.

After a second glass of sherry Beaton declared himself ready, and set out on their important quest.

Although it was luncheon time, the rooms at Burlington House were full, and Maitland looked eagerly round, seeking some figure, that might answer to the idea he had formed of Beaton's intended bride.

There were a variety of visitors evidently provincial, over whom Maitland's eyes rolled unsatisfied till they were arrested by a group which stood before one of the gems of the exhibition—a large picture representing a wide, breezy upland covered with gorse and heather, some sheep feeding in the foreground, and gathering rain-clouds behind. A white-haired neat old gentleman with a high black stian cravat was speaking to an elderly woman who might have been head nurse or a highly respectable cook and housekeeper in a country family. She wore a closely-tied black satin bonnet, and a large shawl of the kind known as Paisley hung in a point from her shoulders to the end of her black skirt, while the hand with which she pointed to a huge hunting scene hanging high above their heads was in a stout brown kid glove with long empty finger-ends.

A step or two in advance stood a slight young girl, whose gown of fawn-colored alpaca was somewhat short and scant; she wore a round cape of black cashmere, its long ends crossed and fastened behind and a broad rimmed straw hat adorned with a bow of white ribbon and a large bunch of very stiff forget-me-nots; her feet, clad in white stockings, were planted in stout, square-toed, serviceable shoes, tied on the instep, and had no heels worth mentioning; the whole costume bore the stamp of village millinery. A quaint little bourgeois figure, yet Maitland's attention was riveted to it. While he looked, Beaton touched him on the shoulder, and exclaimed in a deep whisper:

"Great heavens, there she is!"

Maitland smiled at the dismayed expression of his face.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"Because that is old Tilly, the sur-

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dian, with her; don't you know him looking round for the other victim?"

"He sees you," said Maitland.

Beaton raising his hat, started forward with a frank, pleasant smile to meet the anxious-looking old gentleman who was beckoning him.

"You are a little behind time, are you not, sir?" said Mr. Tilly, in a low tone; "at least it seems a considerable time since we came into this bewildering place."

"I flattered myself I was rather punctual," said Beaton. "Will you allow me to introduce an old friend of mine, Mr. Maitland. I thought it might be as well to make some of my people known to you."

"Certainly, certainly," bowing with old-fashioned politeness; "very happy to know any friend of yours, I am sure. Now—now I will present you. It is really a curious and somewhat daring experiment, but with a man of honor—a I have no doubt all will go well. Of course I must assume to know you—to have known you, I mean. My young ward is quite taken up with the pictures. A—a—Edith, my dear," touching her arm.

She turned quickly and looked full at him with a startled expression, as if suddenly recalled from another world, showing under her large hat a simple, pale, gentle face, the nose a little upturned, the mouth scarcely small enough for beauty, the eyes well set and darkly fringed, but no particular color, the hair soft, light brown and smooth—an ordinary little face though, but pleasant, and not without a certain attraction.

"Edith, my friend, Mr. Beaton, wishes to know you, Mr. Beaton, Miss Vivian. Mr. Maitland, Miss Vivian."

She looked at them steadily, a slight color stealing up in her cheek, as she made a small very small courtesy, quaint but not ungraceful, without any attempt to speak. She was turning again to the pictures when Beaton with what Maitland perceived to be an effort, asked:

"Is this your first visit to the Academy?"

"Yes, I never saw any pictures before, except two or three at home."

"There are quite to many here for comfort, you will be awfully tired before you leave."

"I feel a little giddy when I look round certainly, but I should like to stay on and on till I saw every one."

"You must come constantly, taking a rest between your visits," said Maitland, who was determined to make acquaintance with the poor little heiress.

"I should like it but it would cost such a number of shillings. Mrs. Miles would have to come too, you know."

"Still, I think Mr. Tilly would not object," said Beaton, looking down at her with a caressing smile. "I rather imagine he would find it difficult to refuse you."

"Mr. Tilly, yes, he is very kind, but Mr. Dargan is always unhappy about money," she returned, quite unconscious of the implied compliment, and looked again at the picture.

Beaton seemed checked, and turning, observed politely to Mr. Tilly, "Your friend looks very tired. I think I can find her a seat."

"I'm sure sir, you are very polite," said the weary Mrs. Miles, gratefully, and Beaton escorted her to the long bench in the center of the room, where she sat down with a groan.

"This is a clever picture," said Maitland, who kept his place by Miss Vivian.

"It is wonderful," she said, in a low tone, as if absorbed in contemplation; her voice was naturally soft, and her accent fairly good. "I never thought anything could be painted like it; there are some bits of moorland near my home, and I have seen the clouds gather over them just like those. I almost feel the cold breeze that generally comes up with the rain; and those distant blue hills, how far away they look—that is what I cannot do when I try to paint. I can not make the distance look far."

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