

# 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. Beaton, with company with Winington is introduced to the heiress—Edith Vivian—by the latter's guardian. In the meantime Maitland has fallen in love with Edith, which angers Mrs. Winington, who determines that Edith shall not marry him and lies to her about him. Edith has begun to like Maitland and is mortified to hear Mrs. Winington's false deception of him.

### CHAPTER V. (Continued.)

As the sun came out the night and the rapidly rippling corn was beaten down in several places. The verdure of the wooded hills was richly, deeply green, the mossy cushions of the crags from which the place took its name, and the abundant leafage which grew around them were glittering with rain-drops in the bright sunshine which had broken through the dispersing clouds.

He had scarcely cleared the grounds which surrounded the factor's dwelling when his progress was arrested by a "wee laddie" who was trotting along the road, and who called him to "come ben, for lane" wanted him by Sandy Duncan's at the Beaton Arms.

"Ane! Who?" said Maitland, reining up. "I dinna mind the name, but it's a braw gentleman frae the south."

"From the south? Well, I'll come." A few minutes brought Maitland to the door of the humble hostelry which dominated the chief, indeed the only street of the village, and to his no small surprise he found the "braw gentleman frae the south" to be Colonel Winington.

"Surprised to see me, hey?" he exclaimed, shaking hands cordially. "London is so deucedly hot and dusty—nothing to do or see that you haven't seen and done a dozen times, and Mrs. Winington has taken some crochets into the head about staying to the end of the season. So as my solicitor says I ought to see what's going on here, I ran down for a day or twa."

"I am afraid you will not be very comfortable in this little inn," said Maitland, "and I can't ask you up to our place, for my mother has been dangerously ill, and must be kept very quiet."

"Oh, I shall be all right here. I am not hard to please, and I sha'n't stay long. Come and have some breakfast; there's trout and broiled ham, and cream scones—capital things, cream scones."

Maitland had already breakfasted, but promised to return in half-an-hour to conduct Colonel Winington over the home farm and through the house, where he declined to take up his abode.

"I am a deuced deal more comfortable here," he said.

The sight of this unexpected visitor set Maitland's memory and imagination actively to work. He dared not question him, lest any report of the interest he betrayed might reach the keen ears of Mrs. Winington; but he hoped that her husband might fall into a gossiping mood, which was not unusual with the gallant colonel, who, though as sharp as a Yorkshireman when report and rumour were concerned, had a strain of

scholarship native running through his character, calculated to mislead an ordinary observer and which often puzzled the wife of his bosom, whom he adored as the finest woman, the clearest creature extant. Nevertheless, he occasionally saw through her little games with a species of intuition of which he was infinitely proud.

Maitland rather liked Colonel Winington and by no means envied him the possession of his peerless Jean, though he credited that charming personage with much latent good, which under different circumstances might have been developed.

After a long ramble, and a great deal of business talk, for the colonel was a thorough country gentleman, and knew a thing or two about farming, he accepted Jack's invitation to luncheon, and they repaired to Westown, the factor's pleasant home. Here the colonel greatly gratified Major Maitland by expressing his hearty approval of all he had seen and learned in the course of the morning.

"Jack hasn't gone about the world with his eyes shut, I must say," quoth the old factor. "He has a shrewd eye for cattle, and is a decent judge of crops. I think he is anxious to do his duty by the property. Indeed, I should have had to give up some time past, if I hadn't had him beside me. My eyes are failing me, and I can't get about as I used."

"You couldn't have a better lieutenant," said Colonel Winington, pleasantly; and Jack smiled as he looked back, not so very far either, to his father's stern reprobation of him as a ne'er-do-weel, and a disgrace to the family.

"Shall we have a cup of coffee and a cigar in the bakery?" he suggested. "By all means," returned Winington, rising. "You have a delightful view here, Major Maitland. There's nothing like it up at the house."

"Perhaps not. Give me the Scotsman, Jack. If you'll excuse me, I will stop here and have a nap."

After enjoying the fragrance of their cigars for a few minutes in silence, Colonel Winington observed:

"This is uncommon nice—a deuced deal better than the dusty park, or the shady side of Pall Mall. I have paired off for the next two divisions, so I can breathe the fresh air for awhile. I never knew Mrs. Winington to stay so late in town, she generally wants to be away before the bloom is off the grape; but she is on another tack now." He nodded knowingly. "Of course, you are in the secret! It's her anxiety about her brother that is keeping her. You know what a slippery fellow Beaton is. He has given Mrs. Winington no end of trouble. His quite natural she should try and secure that heiress she has picked up for him; nice little girl, deuced deal too good for Leslie, I think."

Maitland murmured an inarticulate assent.

"Yes; nice soft little dove," resumed Winington after a few meditative puffs. "It has given Mrs. Winington a lot of trouble. She doesn't think I know, but I do!" he chuckled. "She is far too gungy to confess herself beaten if she can help it, and so I say nothing; but I am pretty sure Beaton has got the sack."

"He went off at a tangent to Winford, my place. I know the hairet, it and large being alone like poison. I suspect he's doing the broken-hearted, and made-misselle has headaches, and can't come down to dinner. I suspect my precious brother-in-law is much more cut up about Lady Mary May's engagement with old Brown which has just been announced."

"Has it?" cried Maitland, with vivid interest, his heart beating quickly at the dim delightful possibilities suggested by Winington's revelations.

"Ay! it is a good thing it will be demend-out diamond with them, but that little woodpecker, Edith Vivian, that is a different matter. However, I can't interfere. I'm quite sure my wife is biding her time; she'll bring up her man to the scratch again. If she has set her heart on the match, it will go hard but she'll manage it. She holds on like grim death to anything she takes up. You used to be chums in your boy and girl days, she tells me, and she is one that never forgets old times. I can tell you you are a prime favorite still, and we'll be very glad to see you at Winford this season; can promise you some good pheasant shooting."

Maitland thanked him without accepting.

Soon after the colonel rose, and said he would go back to his inn to write a few letters, and if they could give him a mount, he would ride over to see a neighboring laird whom he had promised to visit when they met in London a few weeks back.

Jack went to sit awhile with his mother, as was his wont in the afternoon, but he scarce knew what he talked about, so filled was his heart, his imagination, with ideas set in motion by Colonel Winington's report of the state of affairs in London. That Beaton had been refused was more than he expected. He did not anticipate such decision on Edith's part. It was by an effort he brought his thoughts under control, and compelled himself to show his usual care in trying to amuse and interest the invalid.

She was surprised and pleased to hear



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of Colonel Winington's visit, with the friendly spirit he displayed. She was very anxious her favorite son should succeed his father both in his home and occupation. She thought her boy had been hardly dealt with that he had suffered for the sins of others as well as his own, and she was anxious to see his future assured before she went hence.

The little description of Colonel Winington's appearance and its results excited and fatigued her. Maitland, therefore, seeing she was inclined to sleep, left her earlier than he usually did, and calling his favorite colly, set forth for a solitary ramble to commune with his own heart, to search out his spirit, and strive to come to some conclusion respecting his future line of conduct.

As he pressed up the side of Craig-rachie hill with firm, elastic tread, his spirits rose, his purpose disengaged itself from the mist of doubt and depression which had blurred it, and at length, reaching a grassy nook sheltered by a big grey crag, where many a time in bygone days he had secluded himself to plan his future, often to think of bonny Jean Beaton, he lay down on the short, thick, sweet grass, and the colly sat gravely beside him, with an air of alertness, as if determined to keep watch while his master slept or rested.

But sleep and dreams were far from Maitland's brain. His thoughts began to take order. If Beaton had tried his chance and failed, one barrier to his own progress was removed. Why should he not do his best to win what he so ardently desired? How was it that he had so quickly grown to love this quiet, pale, half-developed girl? To this there was no distinct reply; only his heart answered, "I love her," only his imagination pictured with a vivid flash the delicate purity of her unpretending aspect, the sweet truthfulness of her steady, thoughtful eyes. What a restful home such a woman could make! What endless interest might be found in the growing knowledge of a nature not over-ready to reveal itself, which, though perfectly candid, had yet a veil of tender reserve. And this defenseless creature was at the mercy of mere intrigues, careful only of their own advantage and reckless of her happiness! It was the duty of any disinterested friend to rescue her if possible.

(To be Continued)

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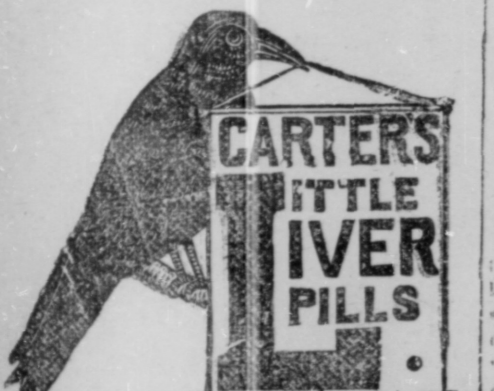
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