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# 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 Maitland 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 description of him.

### CHAPTER VII. (Continued.)

One Saturday morning, however, brought poor Edith two terrible letters. One from Mr. Dargan, announcing that as both Mr. Tilly and himself were of opinion that their ward should no longer be buried alive in a country village, they had accepted a very good offer for the cottage, and let it on lease. His sister, Mrs. Miles, would, he said, speak for herself. He only deeply regretted the circumstances which obliged her to leave her dear charge.

The other was from poor Mrs. Miles, and was a very incoherent production; it was even illegible here and there from big tears which had evidently fallen on the paper. She explained in a confused fashion that an aunt who had shown her kindness in former days was dying of a lingering illness and was quite alone; that she felt it her duty to go and nurse this relative to the last; that it broke her heart to leave her dear Edith, but it could not be avoided; that it would be almost the sorest day she ever had when she left the cottage and that would be on Tuesday next. Finally, she prayed God to bless her dear child, and restore them to each other.

Besides the letter a scrap of paper had been thrust into the envelope, on which was scrawled in tremulous characters these words: "I can't help myself, dear, I can't indeed. I'll tell you all yet; wait a bit, and burn this."

Edith read both letters twice before she took in their meaning; then the full sense of her desolation rushed upon her. Without a home, a tie, a claim on any one, what was she to do? what was to become of her? Only at breakfast a couple of hours ago, Mrs. Winington had been talking of a series of visits she had promised to pay to various country houses. Where was she to turn? The consciousness that she had money enough for all her needs was a sort of abstract idea that brought her no comfort.

There was a tinge of mystery, too, in this sudden wrenching asunder of the faithful Mrs. Miles and herself that completed her distress. Dargan was at the bottom of it. She had an innate distrust of Dargan; and Mr. Tilly, though so much nicer, was a mere puppet in his hands. She had no real friend on earth, but Mrs. Winington, and perhaps Mr. Beaton, though she had no right to trouble either. She gathered up these dreadful letters and ran to Mrs. Winington's private sitting-room, eager to confide her griefs to her only friend and receive counsel, but the room was empty.

Edith sat down, hoping Mrs. Winington might come in before going out, as she often did in the forenoon. On a note she read Mr. Dargan's letter, and for all the time she heard his thin voice.

voice uttering the smoothest words almost seeing his sycophantic grin. His pulse beat quick, with an impatientness of helplessness. Why did they tar Mrs. Miles from her, and why, oh, why did not Mrs. Winington come?

As she thought the handle of the door turned. At the sound Edith started up, and went forward so eagerly that she nearly rushed into Beaton's arms as he came in. She was too full of her troubles to be in any way confused.

"Oh, where, where is Mrs. Winington!" she exclaimed, with a genuine ring of distress in her voice.

"She has just gone out," he returned, looking earnestly at her.

"How unfortunate! I wanted her so much," and a great sob would rise in her throat, in spite of her brave effort to be calm.

"What has happened?" asked Beaton, with grave sympathy. "Can I be of any use?"

Edith looked at him for a moment of doubt, and then broke out, "No, no, no one can be of any use to me! Mr. Dargan can do what he likes!"

"Old rascal! What has he been about?" asked Beaton, with an accent of real wrath that fitted Edith's mood exactly. "I see," he continued, "you have letters. Are they the trouble? Am I presuming too much if I ask to know what distresses you? My sister will not return for a couple of hours. It might be a relief to tell me, even me," with a grave smile.

"I should be very glad, as you are so good to care. Read these, and you will not wonder at my feeling desolate." She handed him the letters, and threw herself on the sofa with self-abandonment very new to her.

Beaton stood by the window and read both epistles in silence. Edith thought the time dreadfully long before he came across to where she sat, and returned them to her.

"Very hard lines for you," he said, "but I do not see how it is to be helped." (Edith had loyally burned poor Mrs. Miles' private scrap.)

"Don't you see it takes away from me any shadow of home! When Mrs. Winington goes I shall be quite, quite alone!" cried Edith.

"And Jean has so many engagements," said Beaton, as if to himself, beginning to pace to and fro with a troubled air. "That will not last long, however. You can make a home where you choose."

"I am afraid I cannot! Where can I go? To some strange old lady who will not like me? For I do not get on with people. You must see that. I am misunderstood," and she thought of Maitland.

"But when they know you they love you," cried Beaton, and continued his walk in silence, till Edith, placing her letters in her pocket, rose, saying, "No thing can be done till I see Mrs. Winington."

"Stay, stay for a few minutes, Miss Vivian. I have a solution to propose," said Beaton, with agitation; "pray hear it patiently." He had thoroughly dramatic instincts, and threw himself into his part, he felt the part what it might.

Edith sat down again. He had so effectively played the calm friend that Edith hardly anticipated what was coming.

"I ought not perhaps to revert to my own wishes," he went on hurriedly—"wishes I have tried to resign, but cannot. Why, Edith, will you not accept a home with me? No, do not speak yet, let me out." He sat down on the sofa beside her. "I can see plainly enough that you have no love for me. I feel too much for you not to perceive our indifference, but as a friend my duty gives you some little pleasure. Do I flatter myself too much?"

"No, indeed!" cried Edith, eager to make some amends for her guilty coldness. "You are always nice and pleasant."

Beaton smiled. "Then do you think it possible for me to make you happy?" said Edith (I must call you Edith), you are so deliciously pure and simple, you don't know what love is. I will never believe you cared a straw for any man." Edith winced. "Let me try and teach you; I know your heart, your mind; I know the sort of life that would suit you; and though I may not be worthy of you, I am not a bad fellow. I have a good temper, and more heart than I thought I had, till you drew it forth. I am a poor man, and I cannot tempt you with wealth, but we shall have enough for a quiet life. We can wander about the continent, and revel in music and pictures, and make a home wherever we go. You are surely not so hard as to be unmoved by such true affection, such warm esteem as mine? If you accept me you can do what you will, independent of guardians or any other nuisance of that kind, and you will make one man very happy."

His quiet earnestness touched Edith; she hesitated and grew very grave as she thought it was quite possible she could be tranquil and happy with such a devoted friend. No one else had ever loved her except poor Mrs. Miles, and gratitude alone ought to make her appreciate a "free-will" offering like Beaton's love. He showed no concealed as-

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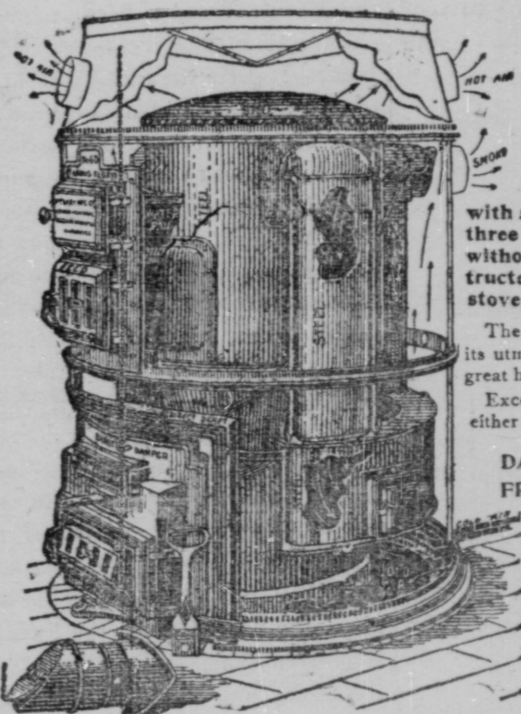
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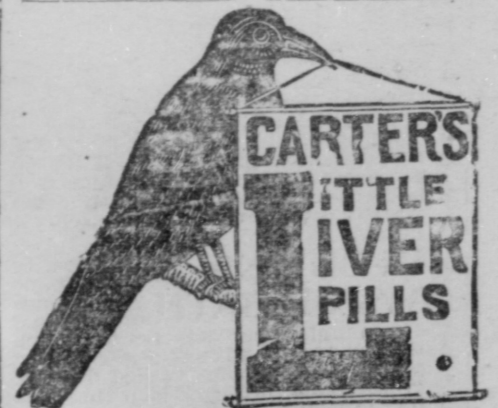
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