

Beaton's Bargain.

BY MRS. ALEXANDER.

SYNOPSIS.

Mrs. Winton, Lady Mary Hay, Leslie Beaton and Jack Maxwell are members of London's smart society set. Beaton is Mrs. Winton'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. Winton 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.

CHAPTER IV. (Continued.)

"Oh," cried Edith, "he has been here! Then he has been tormenting you. What did he say?"

"Well, he was a bit fidgety; but always anxious about you, missie, my dear. And do you know he has even been to see that Mrs. Winton about you?—and you are to go to her on Saturday. I am to be sent home, because this place doesn't suit me; so Jos says. He has grown wonderful careful of my health all at once—in a querulous tone. How he came to know such grand people as that Mrs. Winton and her brother is more than I can tell; anyhow, they are very nice and civil-spoken."

"Yes, they are very delightful; but, dear Miley, I am not going to leave you, or to be ordered about by Mr. Dargan," cried Edith, indignantly.

"Ay, but you must, my dear, Jos is in real earnest about it. He had up the lady and gave her warning on the spot, and we are to be out of this, bag and baggage by twelve o'clock on Saturday morning; so I wish you would just write a line to Sarah, and tell her to have the fire alight in the little parlor, and be sure to have my bed well-aired—sheets and all. Though this is a vale of tears, one needn't suffer more than one can help."

"Well, Miley, I will not stay long; I will come soon to you."

"Ah! my dear, it's little I'll see of you from this time forth forever more," cried Mrs. Miles, who was apt to grow scriptural in her sorrows.

"Why, where am I to be sent?" said Edith, laughing. "I cannot be kept out of my own home."

"Ah! you'll soon be finding another home among all these fine gentlemen."

"They are too fine for me," said Edith, putting out her writing things. "I feel quite stupid among them. It will be a long time before I find another home." And she began to write rapidly.

"Miley," she resumed, after a few minutes' pause, "you remember the other gentleman that Mr. Tilly introduced to us; I mean the dark one?"

"Yes; a quiet, grave man."

"I met him to-day, and he walked all the way back with me. I like him so much! He is serious and gentle; he does not seem to laugh at everything, like Mr. Beaton; and he speaks to me as if I were a reasonable being. I could tell him anything. It is curious, but he gives me the idea that he is sorry for me. He reminds me of my father when he used to look far away, and stroke my head, saying, "Poor child, poor child!"

"Well, missie, don't you go and trust any one too much, least of all a man; they are a selfish lot the best of them. Now, dear, I'll try and sleep a bit."

Edith Vivian had led a singularly secluded, monotonous life. She had been the sole companion of her widowed father, a silent, unconsciously selfish man, who had been reduced from easy circumstances to comparative poverty by

the failure of a bank, and who found absorbing occupation in botany and natural history. When he died, he left his little all to his daughter—a picturesque cottage in a wooded part of Hampshire, and a couple of hundred a year; appointing his old friend, Mr. Tilly, and Mr. Tilly's oracle on business matters, Dargan, her guardians, Dargan, having a sister for whom he wished to provide without cost to himself, placed her in the cottage, and in charge of the little eleven-year-old orphan, as the cheapest mode of maintaining both.

Fortunately, Mrs. Miles proved to be a tender-hearted, conscientious woman, and she lived happily with her young charge, who found ample amusement and occupation in field and garden, woodland and pebbly brook, in needlework and reading what books had belonged to her father. When she was about thirteen, Mrs. Miles so far overcame her dread of Josiah Dargan, her brother, as to claim for some learning to be given to Miss Vivian, that she might be like other young ladies, and even reached the ear of that very distinguished and dusty antiquarian, Mr. Tilly, who did seriously incline to her prayer. So the prim, neat, elderly daughter of the late vicar, who was thankful for any chance of eking out her narrow income, was engaged at an infinitesimal salary, to impart instruction in English, French and the rudiments of music, to the little girl at the cottage.

Edith was not particularly studious, nor was the teaching calculated to interest her. Still she gathered some information, especially on the subjects which took her fancy.

About two years before the beginning of this narrative, her uncle died intestate, and she became the owner of considerable wealth.

Edith herself knew little or nothing about it. Mr. Tilly had told her she would now be well off, but no alteration had been made in her mode of life.

To Dargan, this change in his ward's circumstances was a positive torment. His grasping fingers itched to clutch some of the riches they could touch, but could not take while dread of discovery held him back. His imagination constantly pictured Edith running off with some shrewd fortune-hunter, who would not only gather up every farthing of both the principal and accumulations of this later inheritance, but make him, Dargan, disgorge the considerable pickings he had contrived to get, even out of the miserable two hundred a year he had so long manipulated. To find a suitable (?) husband for his ward before she reached the independence of majority, was the object nearest his heart, and as Edith approached eighteen, his feverish unrest drove him to the expedient he have resorted to.

It was a trial to Edith to part with Mrs. Miles, who, though somewhat better, physically, was terribly depressed in spirit; and it was also something of a trial to go to Mrs. Winton's, but a trial not unmingled with pleasure.

Though all her life a recluse, Edith Vivian was not shy; she was naturally brave, and disposed to trust her fellow-creatures. She was also singularly free from self-consciousness, and her extreme ignorance of life and society liberated her from many of the doubts and fears which would have beset a less complete novice.

"I will write often, and tell you everything; you may be sure I will! You know I love writing; and do—do write to me! If you are not well I will come to you, I will, whatever Mr. Dargan chooses to say." So with many kisses Edith bade her good old companion farewell, and took her seat in the respectable-looking brougham, which, to her surprise, had been engaged by Mr. Dargan's direct order to convey her to South Kensington. On her way there her imagination was chiefly occupied in picturing Mrs. Miles' arrival at the little homely cottage. How lonely she would feel! How Snap the terrier and the collie would welcome her, and then look about for their mistress and playfellow! Well, she would go to them as soon as she had gathered some knowledge of drawing; and persuaded her guardians to let her return next spring for a long spell of study!

Mrs. Winton was at home and alone to receive her. She was ushered into that lady's private sitting-room, a delightful apartment, looking into a large public garden, and furnished with all that could charm the eye and contribute to luxurious ease.

"Ah, Miss Vivian! I am so pleased to see you," cried Mrs. Winton, rising to greet her with great cordiality. "It is really very good of Mr. Tilly to trust you with me! But we shall take great care of you!"—and she drew forward a low, easy-chair. "You are looking pale and tired; I am sure you must be moped to death."

"You are very, very kind to ask me here," said Edith, earnestly. "I am so different from you that I may be tiresome, but—"

"I shall turn you out with inexorable cruelty if you are!" interrupted Mrs. Winton, laughing; "but I do not anticipate such a catastrophe! Now, you must leave all tristesse behind you; and do you know your eyes look suspiciously like tears!"

"Yes, I did cry a little," said Edith,



When a man gets down flat on his back, so that he has to be carried about like a baby, he finally realizes that he is a sick man. Very frequently he has been a sick man for years, but has recklessly refused to recognize nature's warnings. Severe illness is something that does not strike a man like a flash of lightning. It creeps upon him by degrees, and at every step warns him with a new danger signal.

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coloring. "I was so sorry to see Mrs. Miles go away home; I have never been away from her since she came to me, nearly seven years ago."

"Very sweet and nice of you, dear, but it is time you broke away from this incongruous companionship. That good old woman was only fit to be your nurse! You need not discard her, but you have been shamefully neglected, and kept in the background. Now you must be introduced to society suited to your fortune and position."

"I am afraid I am not suited to any society, except that of a few people whom I like and understand. It is a great pleasure for me to look at you and listen to you; I wonder if I shall ever be able to paint you!" said Edith, with simple earnestness. Mrs. Winton was not so blinded by her natural and acquired woodiness as not to perceive and be flattered by this honest and unstinted admiration.

"I wish you a better subject," she said, laughing. "Now, come with me, and I will show you your room before luncheon. Madame Laure has sent some of your things, and I see you have put on one of her dresses."

Edith followed her hostess upstairs, to a pretty comfortable room, where were laid out what seemed to Edith an enormous amount of clothes—clothes, too, of a superb description. Delicate silks, gauzy grenadines, fairy-like hats, coquettish mantles. "What a quantity of money they must have cost!" she cried, aghast. "What will Mr. Dargan say!"

"That you have a right to the common necessities requisite for a young lady who is to live like other people," said Mrs. Winton, carelessly ringing the bell as she spoke. Her summons was almost immediately answered by a grave, well-dressed young woman. "There my dear Miss Vivian, is your special maid! She will tend to your toilet, and she understands her business. Markham! You had better do Miss Vivian's hair before luncheon; she has been living shut up in the country, and I trust to you to do her justice."

At luncheon the only guest was Beaton, who did his best to be fascinating; and then came a crowning joy. Mrs. Winton's smart Victoria conveyed them to a studio quite near, where Edith satisfied her eyes with the drawings, water colors, casts and beautiful objects scattered about, while Mrs. Winton arranged terms with the fashionable artist, who condescended to instruct a few pupils for a high remuneration. It was settled that Edith should commence the following Monday. Some shopping in Regent and Bond Streets and a drive in the park completed the day; and Edith, exhilarated by the unusual movement and variety; found herself quite equal to the ceremony of dinner, as she had never seen dinner served before; and introduction to Colonel Winton, who was quite ready to accept his wife's new favorite unquestioning, as he never interfered with her so long as she left him alone, and did not spend too outrageous a quantity of money.

Meanwhile Jack Maitland still loitered in town, dissatisfied with himself, yet unwilling to leave. He was strong and penetrating enough to be not one whit blinded to Mrs. Winton's real nature, and yet her beauty, her grace, her evident desire to atone in some way for her past heartlessness, dazzled and fascinated him.

That a brilliant woman of fashion, courted and admired as she was, should still remember her first uncouth boyish lover, was enough to make a fool of most men. Jack had long ago ceased to feel the smallest anger against her. He was naturally generous and broad, but not very easily melted, and there was a dash of contempt in the plenary absolution he had extended to bonny Jean Beaton.

"Why should I dislike her for being what she is, rather than what I thought her?" had been his reflection years back,

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W. D. MCKAY

when he began to work his way out of the chaos into which she had plunged him; and, however, attractive she might still be, the core of his opinion was unaltered and unalterable. But Mrs. Winton's beauty and softness appealed to the senses, and Maitland's were still fresh and keen. He could not help the resisted consciousness that his old love was not indispensed to sob out her penitance in his arms, and he knew—none better—how sweet those ripe red lips of hers used to be in the delightfully delusive old days when they wandered together among the "banks and braes" of Craigrothie.

He therefore found it very pleasant to drop into luncheon, and oftener still to tea, though he scarcely went as often as he was asked. It is true that Mrs. Winton was frequently surrounded; but there were occasional hours of quiet tête-à-tête talk, chiefly retrospective, which he could not help enjoying.

Indeed Maitland often wondered what she saw in a plain and somewhat unpolished man like himself to find worth fascinating. Still that process was agreeably exciting, though he was often ungrateful enough when leaving her to be dimly thankful she was not his wife.

There was now a fresh motive for his visits to Fairfield Gardens. He was anxious to see how Beaton's suit prospered. How the little field flowers bore the atmosphere of the splendid hothouse into which she had been transplanted.

Mrs. Winton was dispensing tea to Lady Mary Hay, Beaton, Miss Vivian, a youthful guardsman and a very thick-set elderly man, with a small allowance of neck, who breathed with a snoring sound, and drank his tea noisily.

(To be Continued)

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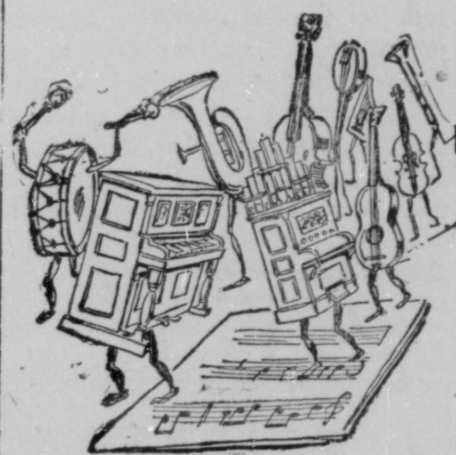
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