

# 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 a widower and being poor Mrs. Winington's orphan, who 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.

CHAPTER III. (Continued.)

RELEASED.

"It is an infernal nuisance being kept here week after week," said Jack Maitland to himself as he walked slowly up Regent Street one bright afternoon, when all the world seemed crowding to shop and drive and disport themselves in the great thoroughfare. The shop windows were resplendent with every luxury that wealth could buy or human ingenuity invent, and the pavement thronged with busy, well-dressed and ill-dressed pedestrians. "There's no sight of its kind like this I suppose," mused Jack, "but I would rather not see it every day, unless I had a good lot of real work to do. It would be better for me to be away back at Craigholme. There is not much doing there now, but a few days' fishing can always be had; that's an amusement one can enjoy with quiet pulses, which is more than can be said of some here." So thinking Maitland approached Oxford Circus, intending to call on a New Zealand acquaintance now settled in Tyburnia.

Suddenly a look of surprised attention replaced the careless glance with which he had noticed the shops and the varied throng, as his eye was attracted by a little figure in a gray waterproof and a brown hat. The wearer was one of a group gazing into a window full of the most delicate and airy creations in the shape of bonnets, wreaths and caps, and was far too much absorbed in contemplation to notice Maitland, who had immediately recognized Edith Vivian.

He was quite startled to see her in that noisy crowded thoroughfare. Country-bred as he was, it seemed to him unbecoming for a lady to venture alone in one of the busiest of London streets, and he hastened to give her the protection of his companionship.

"Miss Vivian, may I hope you remember that I was introduced to you by—"

"Oh, yes," she interrupted, with a bright, startled look of surprise and pleasure, a quick blush flitting over her cheek. "I am very glad to see you. I was just beginning to fear I had taken a wrong turn, that round place is rather puzzling and you will show me the best way back to Regent's Park."

"I shall be most happy to assist you in any way. How is it that you are alone?" asked Jack Maitland, gravely.

"Mrs. Miles is very unwell; she has been suffering dreadfully for some days from neuralgia. So I walked down to Oxford Street to buy a wonderful cure we saw advertised in the newspaper; then I could not help looking into the shops, they are so beautiful, and I have come far out of my way, I am afraid, without knowing it."

"I shall certainly see you home or call a cab, whichever you like," said Maitland. "It is not quite safe for you to wander about alone."

"Why? There is nothing to fear. I take very little money, and no one ever interferes with me."



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"Still, I do not like to see you by yourself. Will you walk or drive?"

"I would rather walk, if you will walk with me. I get so little walking, and it very wearisome to sit all day in the house."

"Very well, let us walk," returned Maitland, amused and touched by her unconscious natural manner. "I suppose you have seen enough of the shops?"

"Indeed I have not. I never dreamed that clothes could be so delightful, that I should want to buy things so much," she said, laughing; "but I do not want to look at them any more just now, if that is what you mean. I have been too long away from Mrs. Miles."

"Very well, let us make for Camden Town at once. I think you said you lived in Camden Town. Can you walk all that way?"

"Oh, it is not far; I used to walk miles in the country."

Little more was said till Maitland had piloted her across Oxford Street, and they had reached the comparative quiet of Langham Place. Maitland noticed the smooth, elastic step of his companion, the ease and grace of her movements; they indicated, he thought (symmetry of form; while her silence, which was not from lack of intelligence, but from the absence of any effort to speak unless she had something to say, had a soothing effect.

"I suppose you ride when you are at home?" began Maitland, who was curious to learn something of her past.

"Not now. When I had my father with me we had a dear old white pony, and I used often to ride on him, sometimes without a saddle; his back was quite broad and comfortable. But one day, afterward, you know" (the understatement that she meant after her father's death. "Mr. Dargan came down and saw poor old Bob feeding in the little field near the cottage. Then he said he was no use, and sold him, and let the field to strangers, so we have only the garden and orchard now."

"I dare say you were sorry for the pony."

"Sorry! I was sorry. It made me hate Mr. Dargan," emphatically. "Indeed, I shall never like him; I have told him so; but I am almost inclined to forgive him for sending my good, kind Miley to live with me. I do not know what would become of me without Miley."

"I suppose that is a pet name for Mrs. Miles?" Miss Vivian gave a little nod of assent. "It is rather alarming to hear a young lady confess that she hates any one."

"Is it? Well, I did hate Mr. Dargan, and I hated the doctor at Littlemore; I cannot or could not help it. I believe I had a bad temper."

"Has time tamed it or have you nobly struggled to overcome your own evil nature?" asked Maitland, looking down with a smile at the sweet, thoughtful face beside him.

Miss Vivian laughed a low, pleasant, happy laugh. "I am afraid not; I grow stronger and did not need the doctor, and as I felt better and brighter and able to enjoy I forgot Mr. Dargan. Now he is going to let me learn drawing, and I feel almost friendly toward him."

There was a pause. Maitland thought with growing interest and sincere compassion that this was not a nature to be satisfied with the shams of society and the paste diamonds of a showy setting to life. Still Beaton could be very fascinating, and she might believe him the best of men, nor have her faith disturbed all the days of her life.

"If Mrs. Miles is well enough to see me, perhaps you will let me look at some of your drawings when we reach your lodgings?"

"Yes, I will gladly. I can draw very little now, but I am to go to a studio in Kensington, at least I hope so. They have promised to get Mr. Dargan's consent."

"Who have promised?"

"Mr. Beaton and his sister. Do you know that he brought his sister to see me? Was it not good of him? And she," a look of infinite pleasure and admiration beaming over her face—"oh, she is lovely! she is like a beautiful gracious queen, and so kind to me, a mere ignorant country girl. She has asked me to stay with her while I am studying, and says she will do all that is necessary for me. Is it not wonderful?"

"Ah!" ejaculated Maitland, "you mean Mrs. Winington. She is certainly charming. When do you go to stay with her?"

"I am not quite sure. I should have gone on Monday, but Mrs. Miles was ill, and I could not leave her; indeed that is the only drawback. I do not like her being alone by herself in the cottage—she will fret; but she says she does not mind. I think Mr. Dargan has told her she must not."

So Mrs. Winington was not letting the grass grow under her feet in the prosecution of her brother's plan. How would it all end for the guileless child, who was probably looked upon by both as a mere incumbrance to her own wealth? What would be the result of Mrs. Winington's training? what of association with Leslie Beaton? How much of her fearless candor, her outspoken truthfulness, would be left after three or four years of life under their guidance? Maitland was conscious of almost fatherly



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make a naturally strong woman stronger and healthier; they will make a naturally sickly woman weaker and more robust, and if indulged in to excess, may be fatal.

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compassion and tenderness toward his young companion, and yet he could do nothing to help or save her! his interference would be worse than useless. If he could induce Jean, Mrs. Winington to espouse her cause! But could he? He thoroughly distrusted that charming personage, although she still had fascination for him. At any rate, he would call on her and endeavor to find her real disposition toward the lonely little heiress.

All this passed through his brain rapidly, and he said aloud, "Mr. Dargan appears a very potent person."

"He is," said Miss Vivian, with a little sigh; "I cannot get any money except by his consent. I do not know what he will think of all Mrs. Winington talks of buying for me."

"I have no doubt Mrs. Winington will manage him if any one can."

More desultory but friendly sympathetic talk brought them to the door of Miss Vivian's temporary abode.

"Will you come in?" she said; and Maitland, with an odd feeling that he was in some way trespassing, followed her into a small sitting-room of a most "lodging-house" order, only saved from vulgarity by its neatness and the abundant flowers which beautified and perfumed it. "If you will sit down for a moment I will see how Mrs. Miles is."

She pointed to a chair and left the room.

"What an abode for an heiress!" thought Jack Maitland, glancing round at the mean furniture and narrow space. "I don't suppose she has the faintest idea of her own possessions. She ought to be informed. I am half inclined to tell her myself. I earnestly hope they will tie up her money strictly when she marries Beaton; for I suppose she must—she can hardly escape." He took up a book, it was White's "Selborne"; he took up another, "Old Mortality." "Not quite the newest literature," said Maitland to himself, with a smile. He looked inside the cover and found a coat of arms and crest, with the name "Richard Vivian," printed under it. "A volume from the family library, I suppose."

At this point in his meditations Miss Vivian re-entered. She had removed her hat, and Maitland observed how much better and more distinguished she looked without it. Her head was small and well poised, and her hair, though pale in color, was abundant, while the gent's composure of her manner and movements gave her dignity.

"I must not ask you to stay," she said. "I find Mrs. Miles so unwell I must attend to her; and the dressmaker sent by Mrs. Winington is waiting for me."

"Then I will not trespass any longer; I hope to have another opportunity of seeing your drawings."

"If you know Mrs. Winington, I may see you at her house."

"I hope I shall; you are very good to have walked all this way with me. Good-bye; and tell me, what is your name? I did not heed Mr. Tilly when he introduced you."

"My name is Maitland."

"I think I did not notice your name, because I was taken up with the sort of likeness I saw about your eyes to my father's. Good-bye."

She held out her hand with a grave, kindly smile. Maitland took and lightly pressed it.

"If I can ever do anything for you," he exclaimed with a sudden impulse, "pray remember that I am at your service." Then, half-ashamed of his speech, he made a rapid retreat.

"Every one is very good to me," was Edith Vivian's reflection, as she hurried away to the grand-looking dressmaker of whom she was a little afraid, and submitted to the process of "trying on," having been previously measured under Mrs. Winington's eye. Faithful, however, to her suffering friend, she begged leave to show herself to Mrs. Miles before she took off the garment.

"Is it not pretty?" she exclaimed, drawing up the blind, that Mrs. Miles might see her clearly. "The skirt is to be trimmed with a quantity of the same lace, and bows of brown satin ribbon; they look lovely against the tussore silk. This is called a simple morning dress! It seems to me too fine to wear. I wonder what Mr. Dargan will say!"

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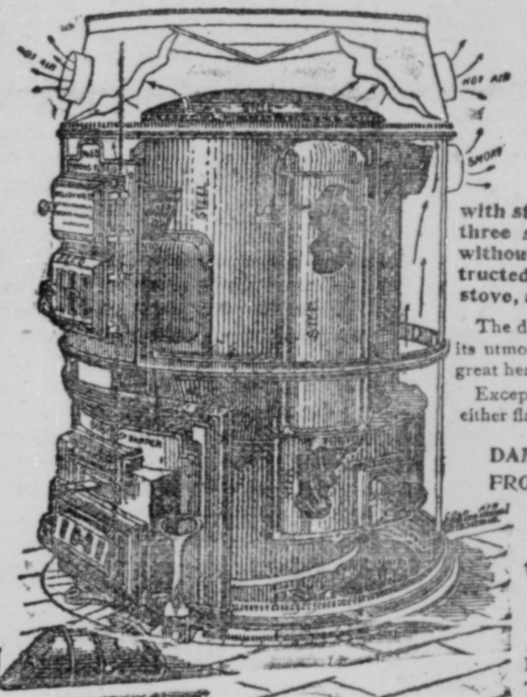
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