

# 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.

## CHAPTER IV. (Continued.)

Miss Vivian was sitting a little apart busy with some fancy work. Maitland could hardly believe that dress could have so improved any face and figure without destroying its individuality. A gown of soft, creamy material all ruffled with foamy lace; her soft hair piled on the top of her head, meeting a fringe of tiny curls parted on her brow; a tea-rose and spray of fern against her neck. She looked like a modest primrose, and had in no way lost her air of delicate quaintness. Maitland felt a sense of refreshment as his eyes fell upon her, and she met them with a sudden brightening of her own as she rose to meet him with an honest unconcealed expression of pleasure.

Mr. Maitland, I thought you had left town," cried Mrs. Winington, holding out her hand. "What has become of you?—and what have we done that you should cut us in this way?"

"I have been wandering to and fro, as usual, and feeling a good deal bored," returned Maitland, making his way to Miss Vivian after greeting Lady Mary and Beaton. "I scarcely knew you as I came in," he said; "such a complete transformation is confusing."

"Yes," said Beaton, "you can see that Jean's reforming fingers have swept the lines where rust had lingered."

"Really, Leslie, you are absolutely brutal!—to associate rust with anything half so ethereal as Edith is too absurd," exclaimed Mrs. Winington.

"The necessities of rhythm obliged me to curtain the word rustic or rusticity. Miss Vivian is strong enough to bear the truth from her most appreciative ally. May I not say so?"

"This, in a caressing tone and with a lingering glance. "Indeed you may! Any one can see I am a rustic, and will most probably always be a rustic," said Edith, answering the first part of his speech with a good-humored smile. "But I should be dull indeed if Mrs. Winington could not improve me."

Then the conversation became general, and plans were made for taking Miss Vivian to Windsor, and a dinner at Richmond.

"And what do you think of the theatre?" asked Maitland, who had drawn a chair beside Miss Vivian.

"I like it better than anything else except the studio, and even better than that sometimes," she said, earnestly. "I cannot sleep afterward, it seems so real to me; I think over it, and feel so glad the people are made happy at last. I have never seen a tragedy; I do not think I could bear one."

"You had better realize the unreality of the drama before you risk it," returned Maitland smiling. "And how is Mrs. Miles? I trust she is better."

"I hope so—I think so; at least she does not complain in her letters; but she must be lonely and melancholy without me. But I shall go back to her when the studio closes."



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"Dearest Jean," said Lady Mary, in an aside quite audible to Maitland. "I cannot stand 'Go-bang' any longer! Do take him off my hands and let me have a turn with your brother, otherwise you will see me a petrified corpse at your feet."

So for the rest of the evening Miss Vivian was in a Maitland's charge, and both felt that it was the better part.

## CHAPTER V. REFUSED.

The days took to themselves wings—wings of pleasure, the less self-indulgent because refined—and flew away with not surprising rapidity. Mrs. Winington was supremely content. It was no longer difficult to attract Jack Maitland to her house. He was ready to come on the slightest provocation. The slow-moving bill on which he so long waited had at last been before the committee; he had given his evidence and was free to return to his native wilds—yet he lingered.

True, he was still calm and undemonstrative but Mrs. Winington knew him in the days when he had not acquired his present self-mastery, and could not believe that the old fire which once burned so strongly was quite extinguished or exhausted, and she found an absorbing interest in the endeavor to rekindle the flame. Never had she been so generally kind and considerate. Edith thought her an angel disguised in a fashionable exterior. Her brother rejoiced in the spell of sunshine, though he had a shrewd idea why "Jeanie was so deucedly amiable."

While Maitland found his imagination less and less occupied with Mrs. Winington's lovely, loving eyes; her smiling, kissable lips; and the sweet, half-playful, half-tender expressions that fell from them, other thoughts, other imaginings replaced these. Yet, though he could not tear himself away, he was miserable, uneasy, self-reproachful. He watched with keenest perception every move in the game of which Edith Vivian was the unconscious prize. He saw too clearly the utter indifference which underlay Beaton's attentions and apparent devotion; he fancied that some instinctive recognition of this was at the root of Miss Vivian's easy, unmovable friendliness. For Beaton was a favorite with women, and what was there to guard that simple, untaught, trusting girl from his influence, but instinct?

One question raked him by day and by night. Was he bound by his knowledge of the facts to tell the true state of affairs to Miss Vivian, and so destroy Beaton's chance?—or ought he to be loyal to the friend who had trusted him from the first? He could not answer it; yet he was convinced that the forlorn little heiress was gently floating downstream to her certain misery. She could never be satisfied with such a life as Mrs. Winington's. She needed a real home to be a shelter from sun or storm; a husband who would go hand in hand with her through every step of life's road; and what with self-tormenting and perpetual watching, Jack Maitland soon grew to think there could not be a fairer lot than to be that husband.

Though Miss Vivian as generally handed over to Beaton in the many parties and expeditions organized by Mrs. Winington, Maitland found opportunities for conversation more frequently than Mrs. Winington noticed and these confirmed him in his idea that Edith's was no common nature nor was her gentleness in any way weak.

There was something touching in the quiet preference she unconsciously showed him and which completed her attraction. He felt, without the slightest respect to her, that had he a fair field he might have won her heart and made her happier than Leslie Beaton ever could. Her girlish curiosity and frank questioning about himself, his history, his people, half-amused him. Had he both father and mother alive?—and, sisters?

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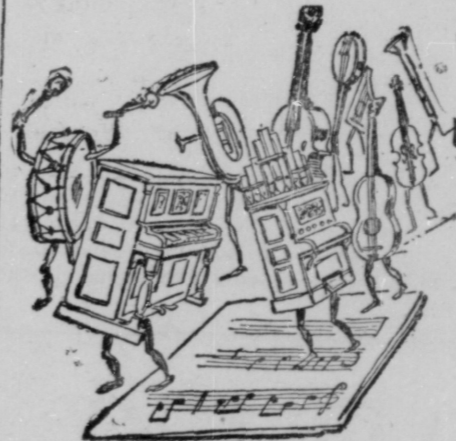
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