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Monsieur Beaucaire

By Booth Tarkington

An Interesting Serial Story, a Portion of Which will be Published in the Review Until Completed.

(Continued from last week)

"Ha, ha! I am jus' a poor Frenchman."
"Would that a few Englishmen had shown themselves as 'poor' tonight. The vile cowards, not to help you!" With that, suddenly possessed by her anger, she swept away from him to the coach. Sir Hugh, groaning loudly, was being assisted into the vehicle. "My little poltroons," she said, "what are you doing with your fellow craven, Sir Hugh Guilford, there?"

"Madam," replied Molyneux humbly, "Sir Hugh's leg is broken. Lady Rellerton graciously permits him to be taken in."

"I do not permit it! M. de Chateaurien rides with us."

"But—"
"Sir! Leave the wretch to groan by the roadside," she cried fiercely, "which plight I would were that of all of you! But there will be a pretty story for the gossips tomorrow! And I could almost find pity for you when I think of the wits when you return to town. Fine gentlemen, you; hardy bravos, by heaven, to leave one man to meet a troop of horse single handed while you huddle in shelter until you are overthrown and disarmed by servants! Oh, the wits! Heaven save you from the wits!"

"Madam."
"Address me no more! M. de Chateaurien, Lady Rellerton and I will greatly esteem the honor of your company. Will you come?"

She stepped quickly into the coach and was gathering her skirts to make room for the Frenchman, when a heavy voice spoke from the shadows of the tree by the wayside.

"Lady Mary Carlisle will, no doubt, listen to a word of counsel on this point."

The Duke of Winterset rode out into the moonlight, composedly untying a mask from about his head. He had not shared the flight of his followers, but had retired into the shade of the oak, whence he now made his presence known with the utmost coolness.

"Gracious heavens, 'tis Winterset!" exclaimed Lady Rellerton.

"Turned highwayman and cutthroat!" cried Lady Mary.

"No, no," laughed M. Beaucaire, somewhat unsteadily, as he stood, swaying a little, with one hand on the coach door, the other



FOR A MOMENT HE CUT THROUGH THE RING AND CLEARED A SPACE ABOUT HIM.

pressed hard on his side, "he only oversee. He is jus' a little bashful, sometime. He is a great man, but he don't want all the glory!"

"Barber," replied the duke, "I must tell you that I gladly descend to bandy words with you. Your monstrous impudence is a claim to rank I cannot ignore. But a lackey who has himself followed by six other lackeys—"

"Ha, ha! Has not M. le Duc been busy all this evening to justify me? And I think mine mus' be the best six. Ha, ha! You think?"

"M. de Chateaurien," said Lady Mary, "we are waiting for you."

"Pardon," he replied. "He has something to say. Maybe it is best if you hear it now."

"I wish to hear nothing from him—ever!"

"My faith, madam," cried the duke, "this saucy fellow has paid you the last insult! He is so sure of you he does not fear you will believe the truth. When all is told, if you do not agree he deserved the lashing we planned to—"

"I'll hear no more!"

"You will bitterly repent it, madam. For your own sake I entreat—"

"And I also," broke in M. Beaucaire. "Permit me, mademoiselle. Let him speak."

"Then let him be brief," said Lady Mary, "for I am earnest to be quit of him. His explanation of an attack on my friend and on my carriage should be made to my brother."

"Alas that he was not here," said the duke, "to aid me! Madam, was your carriage threatened? I have endeavored only to expunge a debt I owed to Bath and to avenge an insult offered to yourself through—"

"Sir, sir, my patience will bear little more!"

"A thousand apology," said M. Beaucaire. "You will listen, I only beg, Lady Mary!"

She made an angry gesture of assent.

"Madam, I will be brief as I may. Two months ago there came to Bath a French gambler calling himself Beaucaire, a desperate fellow with the cards or dice, and all the men of fashion went to play at his lodging, where he won considerable sums. He was small, wore a black wig and mustachio. He had the insolence to show himself everywhere until the master of ceremonies rebuffed him in the

pump room, as you know, and after that he forbore his visits to the rooms. Mr. Nash explained (and was confirmed, madam, by indubitable information) that this Beaucaire was a man of unspeakable, vile, low birth, being, in fact, no other than a lackey of the French king's ambassador, Victor by name, de Mirepoix's barber. Although his condition was known, the hideous impudence of the fellow did not desert him, and he remained in Bath, where none would speak to him."

"Is your farrago nigh done, sir?"

"A few moments, madam. One evening, three weeks gone, I observed a very elegant equipage draw up to my door, and the Duke of Chateaurien was announced. The young man's manners were worthy—the most monstrous assurance. He declared himself a noble traveling for pleasure. He had taken lodgings in Bath for a season, he said, and called at once to pay his respects to me. His tone was so candid—in truth, I am the simplest of men, very easily gulled—and his stroke so bold, that I did not for one moment suspect him, and, to my poignant regret—though in the humblest spirit I have shown myself eager to atone—that very evening I had the shame of presenting him to yourself."

"The shame, sir!"

"Have patience, pray, madam. Ay, the shame! You know what figure he hath cut in Bath since that evening. All ran merrily with him until several days ago Captain Badger denounced him as an impostor, vowing that Chateaurien was nothing."

"Pardon," interrupted M. Beaucaire. "'Castle Nowhere' would have been so much better. Why did you not make him say it that way, monsieur?"

Lady Mary started. She was looking at the duke, and her face was white. He continued, "Poor Captain Badger was stabbed that same day!"

"Most befitting poor Captain Badger," muttered Molyneux.

"—and his adversary had the marvelous insolence to declare that he fought in my quarrel! This afternoon the wounded man sent for me and imparted a very horrifying intelligence. He had discovered a lackey whom he had seen waiting upon Beaucaire in attendance at the door of this Chateaurien's lodging. Beaucaire had disappeared the day before Chateaurien's arrival. Captain Badger looked closely at Chateaurien at their next meeting and identified him with the missing Beaucaire beyond the faintest doubt. Overcome with indignation, he immediately proclaimed the impostor. Out of regard for me he did not charge him with being Beaucaire. The poor soul was unwilling to put upon me the humiliation of having introduced a barber, but the secret weighed upon him till he sent for me and put everything in my hands. I accepted the odium, thinking only of atonement. I went to Sir John Wimpleton's fete. I took poor Sir Hugh, there, and these other gentlemen aside, and told them my news. We narrowly observed this man and were shocked at our simplicity in not having discovered him before. These are men of honor and cool judgment, madam. Mr. Molyneux had acted for him in the affair of Captain Badger and was strongly prejudiced in his favor, but Mr. Molyneux, Sir Hugh, Mr. Bantison, every one of them, in short, recognized him. In spite of his smooth face and his light hair the adventurer Beaucaire was writ upon him amazing plain. Look at him, madam, if he will dare the inspection. You saw this Beaucaire well the day of his expulsion from the rooms. Is not this he?"

M. Beaucaire stepped close to her. Her pale face twitched.

"Look!" he said.

"Oh, oh!" she whispered with a dry throat and fell back in the carriage.

"Is it so?" cried the duke.

"I do not know. I—cannot tell."

"One moment more. I begged these gentlemen to allow me to wipe out the insult I had unhappily offered to Bath, but particularly to you. They agreed not to forestall me or to interfere. I left Sir John Wimpleton's early and arranged to give the sorry rascal a lashing under your own eyes, a satisfaction due the lady into whose presence he had dared to force himself."

"Noblesse oblige!" said M. Beaucaire in a tone of gentle inquiry.

"And now, madam," said the duke, "I will detain you not one second longer. I plead the good purpose of my intentions, begging you to believe that the desire to avenge a hateful outrage, next to the wish to serve you, forms the dearest motive in the heart of Winterset."

"Bravo!" cried Beaucaire softly.

Lady Mary leaned toward him, a thriving terror in her eyes. "It is false!" she faltered.

"Monsieur should not have been born so high. He could have made little book."

"You mean it is false?" she cried breathlessly.

"'Od's blood, is she not convinced?" broke out Mr. Bantison.

"Fellow, were you not the ambassador's barber?"

"It is all false!" she whispered.

"The mos' fine art, mademoiselle. How long you think it take M. de Winterset to learn that speech after he write it out! It is a mix of what is true and the mos' chaste art. Monsieur has become a man of letters. Perhaps he may enjoy that more than the wars. Ha, ha!"

Mr. Bantison burst into a roar of laughter. "Do French gentlemen fight lackeys! Ho, ho, ho! A pretty country! We English do as was done tonight—have our servants beat them."

"And attend ourselves," added M. Beaucaire, looking at the duke, "somewhat in the background! But, pardon, he mocked, 'that rascal' me. Francois, return to Mr. Bantison and these gentlemen their weapons."

"Will you answer a question?" said Molyneux mildly.

"Oh, with pleasure, monsieur."

"Were you ever a barber?"

"No, monsieur," laughed the young man.

"Pah!" exclaimed Bantison. "Let me question him. Now, fellow, a confession may save you from jail. Do you deny you are Beaucaire?"

"Deny to a such judge?"

"Ha!" said Bantison. "What more do you want, Molyneux? Fellow, do you deny that you came to London in the ambassador's suit?"

"No, I do not deny."

"He admits it! Didn't you come as his barber?"

(Continued next week)

AN OFFICIAL DIRECTORY

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