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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)

"Yes, my friend," as his barber.
Lady Mary cried out faintly and, shuddering, put both hands over her eyes.

"I'm sorry," said Molyneux. "You fight like a gentleman."

"I thank you, monsieur."

"You called yourself Beaucaire?"

"Yes, monsieur." He was swaying to and fro. His servants ran to support him.

"I wish"—continued Molyneux, hesitating. "Evil take me, but I'm sorry you're hurt."

"Assist Sir Hugh into my carriage," said Lady Mary.

"Farewell, mademoiselle!" M. Beaucaire's voice was very faint. His eyes were fixed upon her face. She did not look toward him.

They were propping Sir Hugh on the cushions. The duke rode up close to Beaucaire, but Francois seized his bridle fiercely and forced the horse back on its haunches.

"The man's servants worship him," said Molyneux.

"Curse your insolence!" exclaimed the duke. "How much am I to bear from this varlet and his varlets? Beaucaire, if you have not left Bath by tomorrow noon, you will be clapped into jail, and the lashing you escaped tonight shall be given you thrice tenfold!"

"I shall be—in the—assembly—room—at 9—o'clock, one week—from—tonight," answered the young man, smiling jauntily, though his lips were colorless. The words cost him nearly all his breath and strength. "You must keep—in the—background, monsieur. Ha, ha!"

The door of the coach closed with a slam.

"Mademoiselle—fare—well!"

"Drive on!" said Lady Mary.

M. Beaucaire followed the carriage with his eyes. As the noise of the wheels and the hoof beats of the accompanying cavalcade grew fainter in the distance the handkerchief he had held against his side dropped into the white dust, a heavy red splotch.

"Only—roses," he gasped and fell back in the arms of his servants.

CHAPTER V.

BEAU NASH stood at the door of the rooms, smiling blandly upon a dainty throng in the pink of its finery and gay furbelows. The great exquisite bent his body constantly in a series of consummately adjusted bows—before a great dowager, seeming to sweep the floor in august deference; somewhat stately to the young bucks; greeting the wits with gracious friendliness and a twinkle of raillery; inclining with fatherly gallantry before the beauties; the degree of his inclination measured the altitude of the recipient as accurately as a nicely calculated sand glass measures the hours.

The king of Bath was happy, for wit, beauty, fashion—to speak more concretely, nobles, belles, gamblers, beaux, statesmen and poets—made fairyland (or opera bouffe, at least) in his dominions; play ran higher and higher, and Mr. Nash's coffers filled up with gold. To crown his pleasure, a prince of the French blood, the young Comte de Beaujolais, just arrived from Paris, had reached Bath at noon in state, accompanied the Marquis de Mirepoix, the ambassador of Louis XV. The beau dearly prized the society of the lofty, and the present visit was an honor to Bath; hence to the master of ceremonies. What was better, there would be some profitable hours with the cards and dice. So it was that Mr. Nash smiled never more benignly than on that bright evening. The rooms rang with the silvery voices of women and delightful laughter while the fiddles went merrily, their melodies chiming sweetly with the joyance of his mood.

The skill and brazen effrontery of the ambassador's secondarily servant in passing himself off for a man of condition formed the point



THE HAPPY GENTLEMAN, WITH LADY MARY CARLISLE UPON HIS ARM, WENT GRANDLY ABOUT THE ROOMS.

of departure for every conversation. It was discovered that there were but three persons present who had not suspected him from the first; and, by a singular paradox, the most astute of all proved to be old Mr. Bickitt, the traveler, once a visitor at Chateaurien; for he, according to report, had by a coup of diplomacy entrapped the impostor into an admission that there was no such place. However, like poor Captain Badger, the worthy old man had held his peace out of regard for the Duke of Winterset. This nobleman, heretofore secretly disliked, suspected of irregular devices at play and never admired, had won admiration and popularity by his remorse for the mistake and by the modesty of his attitude in endeavoring to atone for it,

without presuming upon the privilege of his rank to laugh at the indignation of society; an action the more praiseworthy because his exposure of the impostor entailed the disclosure of his own culpability in having stood the villain's sponsor. Tonight, the happy gentleman, with Lady Mary Carlisle upon his arm, went grandly about the rooms, sowing and reaping a harvest of smiles. 'Twas said work would be begun at once to rebuild the duke's countryseat, while several ruined Jews might be paid out of prison. People gazing on the beauty and the stately, but modest hero by her side said they would make a noble pair. She had long been distinguished by his attentions, and he had come brilliantly out of the episode of the Frenchman, who had been his only real rival. Wherever they went there arose a buzz of pleasing gossip and adulation.

Mr. Nash, seeing them near him, came forward with greetings. A word on the side passed between the nobleman and the exquisite.

"I had news of the rascal tonight," whispered Nash. "He lay at a farm till yesterday, when he disappeared; his ruffians too."

"You have arranged?" asked the duke.

"Fourteen bailiffs are watching without. He could not come within gunshot. If they clap eyes on him, they will hustle him to jail, and his cutthroats shall not avail him a hair's weight. The impatient swore he'd be here by 9, did he?"

"He said so, and 'tis a rash dog, sir."

"It is just 9 now."

"Send out to see if they have taken him."

"Gladly." The beau beckoned an attendant and whispered in his ear.

Many of the crowd had edged up to the two gentlemen with apparent carelessness, to overhear their conversation. Those who did overhear repeated it in covert asides, and this circulating undertone, confirming a vague rumor that Beaucaire would attempt the entrance that night, lent a pleasurable color of excitement to the evening. The French prince, the ambassador and their suits were announced. Polite as the assembly was, it was also curious, and there occurred a mannerly rush to see the newcomers. Lady Mary, already pale, grew whiter as the throng closed round her. She looked up pathetically at the duke, who lost no time in extricating her from the pressure.

"Wait here," he said. "I will fetch you a glass of negus," and disappeared. He had not thought to bring a chair, and she, looking about with an increasing faintness and finding none, saw that she was standing by the door of a small side room. The crowd swerved back for the passage of the legate of France, and pressed upon her. She opened the door and went in.

The room was empty save for two gentlemen, who were quietly playing cards at a table. They looked up as she entered. They were M. Beaucaire and Mr. Molyneux.

She uttered a quick cry and leaned against the wall, her hand to her breast. Beaucaire, though white and weak, had brought her a chair before Molyneux could stir.

"Mademoiselle—"

"Do not touch me!" she said, with such frozen abhorrence in her voice that he stopped short. "Mr. Molyneux, you seek strange company!"

"Madam," replied Molyneux, bowing deeply, as much to Beaucaire as to herself, "I am honored by the presence of both of you."

"Oh, are you mad!" she exclaimed contemptuously.

"This gentleman has exalted me with his confidence, madam," he replied.

"Will you add your ruin to the scandal of this fellow's presence here? How he obtained entrance—"

"Pardon, mademoiselle," interrupted Beaucaire. "Did I not say I should come? M. Molyneux was so obliging as to answer for me to the fourteen friends of M. de Winterset and Meesteire Nash."

"Do you not know," she turned vehemently upon Molyneux, "that he will be removed the moment I leave this room? Do you wish to be dragged out with him? For your sake, sir, because I have always thought you a man of heart, I give you a chance to save yourself from disgrace—and—your companion from jail. Let him slip out by some retired way, and you may give me your arm and we will enter the next room as if nothing had happened. Come, sir—"

"Mademoiselle—"

"Mr. Molyneux, I desire to hear nothing from your companion. Had I not seen you at cards with him I should have supposed him in attendance as your lackey. Do you desire to take advantage of my offer, sir?"

"Mademoiselle, I could not tell you on that night—"

"You may inform your high born friend, Mr. Molyneux, that I heard everything he had to say; that my pride once had the pleasure of listening to his high born confession!"

"Ah, it is gentle to taunt one with his birth, mademoiselle! Ah, no! There is a man in my country who says strange things of that—that a man is not his father, but himself."

"You may inform your friend, Mr. Molyneux, that he had a chance to defend himself against accusation; that he said all!"

"That I did say all I could have strength to say. Mademoiselle, you did not see—as it was right—that I had been stung by a big wasp. It was nothing, a scratch; but, mademoiselle, the sky went round and the moon danced on the earth. I could not wish that big wasp to see he had stung me; so I must only say what I can have strength for, and stan' straight till he is gone. Beside, there are other rizzons. Ah, you must believe! My Molyneux I see for, and tell him all, because he show courtesy to the young Frenchman, and I can trust him. I trust you, mademoiselle—long ago—and would have told you ev'rything, except jus' because—well, for the romance, the fon! You believe! It is so clearly so. You do believe, mademoiselle!"

She did not even look at him. M. Beaucaire lifted his hand appealingly toward her. "Can there be no faith in—in"—he said timidly, and paused. She was silent, a statue, my Lady Disdain.

"If you had not believed me to be an impostor; if I had never said I was Chateaurien; if I had been jus' that M. Beaucaire of the story they told you, but never with the heart of a lackey, an honest man, a man, the man you knew, himself, could you—would you?" He was trying to speak firmly, yet as he gazed upon her splendid beauty he choked slightly and fumbled in the lace at his throat with unsteady fingers. "Would you—have let me ride by your side in the autumn moonlight?" Her glance passed by him as it might have passed by a footman or a piece of furniture. He was dressed magnificently, a multitude of orders glittering on his breast. Her eyes took no knowledge of him.

(Continued next week)

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