

BARGAIN BRIDE

CHAPTER IV

"Gee whis, I don't see how you can ever go then!" Jerry commented, smiling.

"We all freckle that way," Barrett thought. He tightened his hand on the boy's. Nice youngster! Deserving of everything square and good! Odd how it made you feel to see family traits intensify...rather melted a heart and made you humble...made you want to make up for the things you hadn't had, to be certain there would be no gaps in the unfolding life.

"I wish I could take you back with me, Jerry," said Barrett without knowing that he had meant to say it.

"Gee whis, wouldn't that be great!" Gerald answered. His eyes brightened.

"I will—some day!" Barrett stated, and his chin squared. "And I keep my word," he thought, looking down on Jerry. "I wonder whether you know that?"

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Mrs. Cook, in whose house Gerald made his home, appeared at the doorway. "You'll catch cold without your hat, Gerald!" she called sharply. Gerald's face changed; Barrett frowned, pulling on his thick gloves. He was not at all satisfied about the situation. Gerald had admitted that he would like a new tutor, that he had not "exactly liked" Mr. Dexter. Playing checkers with Barrett he had said "This is fine. I like to play checkers but, you see, nobody ever has time to play with me."

Rolling toward New York Barrett wondered perplexedly where he was to find the new, right home for Gerald, a home ruled by some comfortable, portly soul who would know that a small boy's needs are not entirely answered by a full dinner plate and who would see to it that he was fed in all ways.

Marcia had been a criminal—and so had Barrett himself! But he had felt that his success might be made by a trip to the Gobi, and in that belief time had proved him right. He hated rich men's idle sons; he could not be one. Archeology was not his hobby; his work and a work to which he devoted his entire energy. It was absurd, he realized, to reproach himself with the fact that he had not stayed at home to play nursemaid to his sister's child. Yet he had known his sister, and his compunction persisted.

Marcia had promised that through old Annie, a maid who knew of the affair, she would watch over the boy. So far as Barrett could discover, Annie had not made even one trip to Mrs. Cooke's farm house. He felt increasing resentment, reminding himself that he was a fool to have placed the slightest trust in any of Marcia's easy promises. If he reproached her (as he would not, kept by common sense from making futile notions) Marcia would probably murmur, "But I thought, Barry—I really thought Annie had gone. I told her to go—I'm certain, dear!" And this murmur made, she would be done with the matter. Barrett shook his head. There was no understanding how anyone could shake responsibility as Marcia did.

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The boy was appealing too. Engagingly unspoiled, obviously a truth-teller and softened so easily by kindness. It was all too evident that kindnesses were not common for him.

"Dance!" said Barrett, half-aloud but feelingly. He could not remember being more ashamed and irritated. Shamed at having had part in an arrangement so patently unsatisfactory and irritated by Marcia's running true, as she always did, to her selfish type.

Civilization? The devil with it! Allowing such tangles to be hidden, making them things to hide! Barrett was weary of lies, evasions, unfairness to those who could not declare their rights. He mused unhappily for some time on these and other dark facts.

(To Be Continued)

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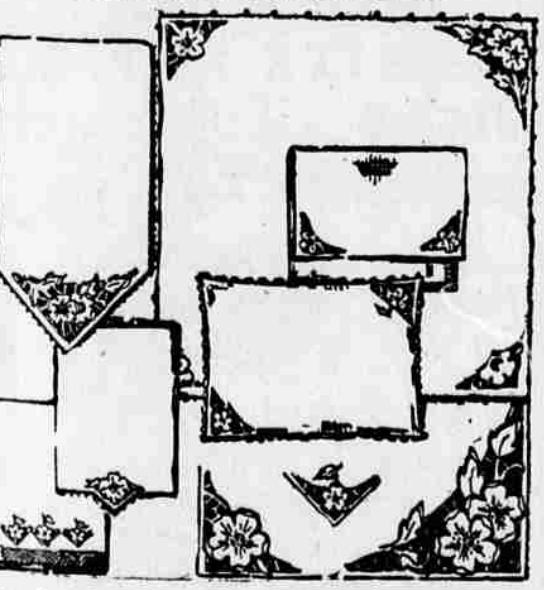
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