

ARGAIN BRIDE

CHAPTER XVIII
 "You'll have to go," she said shortly to Elinor.
 "I suppose so," the girl agreed dully. She was standing by a window, staring out and seeing nothing.
 "What are you moping about now?" Lida questioned harshly.
 "You know as well as I do," Elinor answered, but in her unhappy eyes was no suspicion that her mother knew more of the matter than she did.
 "Why can't you have more pride? A woman doesn't wear her heart on her sleeve."
 "I know," Elinor admitted slowly, "but I can't seem to help it!" She left the room then, somewhat blindly.

"Little fool!" Lida murmured. She felt a vague compunction and irritation over the situation. Elinor always had been so trying.
 Barrett had decided he would go to see Miss Ella early that day in order to miss a possible encounter with Elinor or her mother. Seeing either would be vinegar to his wound. At the very moment he was starting across the street Lida said to her daughter, "Well, let's get it over!" The girl agreed quickly. If Barrett were going to Miss Ella's he would, of course, drop in for tea. It was a shock to her, therefore, as the butler was taking her coat to hear Barrett Colvin's voice coming from the next room.

FOR a moment Elinor closed her eyes, feeling sick and dizzy. Then, pulling herself together, she heard as if from afar, the butler's voice booming out, "Mrs. Stafford, Miss Stafford!"

She never knew how she entered the dimly-lit drawing room, never knew what she said, Lida saw Barrett Colvin turn lemon white, the pallor of men who are hard-tanned. After she had kissed Miss Ella with a rather exaggerated tenderness she held out her hand to him. Elinor nodded without looking at Barrett and sank to a chair. There was a faintly ironic smile upon Lida's lips. Really the child was reacting to love as the Victorians did!

Miss Ella sat erect. In her day "ladies" had not reclined on chairs. Her dimmed, yet keen eyes were fixed first on Barrett and then on Elinor. His manner toward the girl had changed, she saw. It was quite obvious. What had made Barrett change? What had he discovered about Elinor to make him turn away in this abrupt fashion? The Colvin men were gentlemen. Not one of them would show a woman attentions and then cease without a reason. There must have been a reason. What could it have been? Miss Ella trusted Barrett Colvin's judgment as she trusted that of no one else. It looked as though again her will must be changed.

Barrett did not like Lida either. Miss Ella saw how he stiffened as Lida appealed prettily for his opinion about this and that.

There was a lull in the talk and Barrett moved suddenly. Miss Ella did not want him to go so soon. A few more moments and she would be entirely certain of the truth. She would be able to read it in his honest face.

"Have you seen Bessie recently?" Miss Ella asked Lida. Barrett was sitting back now, having missed that possible moment for exit.

"Oh, yes," Lida laughed. "I went to see her the other morning. Dear Bessie—a perfectly impossible creature came to the house asking for help on such a flimsy pretext. The woman was simply reeking with liquor and Bessie gave her two dollars. I remonstrated—I felt I must—and Bessie said that in the woman's place she thought she might drink too."

Miss Ella's lips grew tight. "I am surprised at Bessie," she said. (To be continued)

LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE

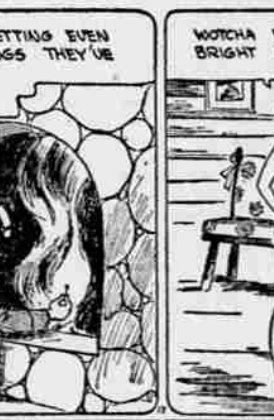
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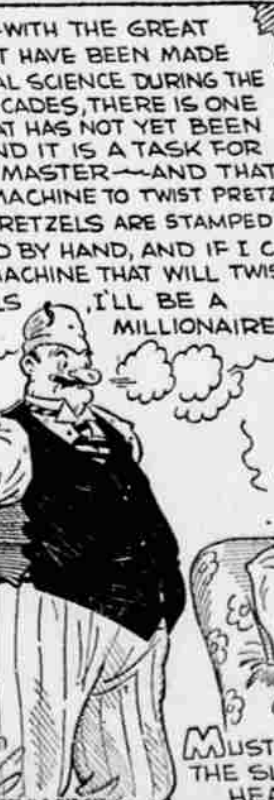
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