ARGAIN BRIDE

by KATHARINE HAVILAND-TAYLOR

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CHAPTER XXXI

butler bowed. The new mis- was going to bring spring and me to the old place, he was Already the house seemed And never had he seen ter, lovelier face.

the meal was finished Eli- d Barrett parted. She was r Hutten to bring the car when she was ready to go her father. Barrett was go- look in upon Marcia for half or so.

ape, he suggested doubtfully, een eyes on her face, they have tea together at a little our. He spoke casually, anx- t to force upon her any more than she liked. They could then about several business that must be settled. If d not suit, he went on, they ut it off until another day. uited her perfectly, Elinor as- him. With quick-beating heart w him turn from her. ll later then," he said.

RETT found Marcia as nervous an undisciplined woman may n she is forced to wait for the he dreads. She was lying, sur- d by many pillows, on an old sofa upholstered in turquoise. e was very white and her eyes bigger and darker than ever. t, coming in from his walk in k fresh air, was stifled by the the room and the heavy odor e roses, freesias and carna-

is drew his head down, kissed d patted his cheek with one hand. All the miserable morn- ll her mornings were miser- w—she had tried to think only happiness and to forget her But no matter how she tried ld not manage it. Marcia knew f Elinor should find out about Barrett would explain. And explained. Elinor would be sure her mother. Or some friend. girl would not?

r that the whisper would trav- Dick would find out. And if found out he would never, never e her. She was growing more of that fact every day. She ted him only to whiten with swers. "Dick, don't you loathe "Why consider them, sweet? aren't worth it, are they. And n't have to consider them, you dear—"

they didn't have to if Barrett told anyone. But if he told any- ey might have to. She had lain d the whole night, try- be decent about it, to be happy rrett; but failing, knowing only

rett said bluntly, "It's about here, Marcia. It's no wonder el ill—"

well he remembered Marcia's e's last days. The overheated in which she preferred to gasp, ickening odor of flowers. rcia," he went on gently, "you d have some windows open. you been out at all today?"

not well enough," she an- d moodily. "You don't realize ll I am, Barrett. No man could would if he could!" she ended ly.

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sat down in a straight chair was near her sofa. He hoped as not going to act as she had old days. He had come there ly in spite of the twist that fate iven his life. He had come feel- that the tangled skein would ghten out to give, at least, an as- ce of peace to Elinor and him-

heard Marcia's voice again. She d her refrain. "I am very, very arrett!" she stated. He studied frowning, sorry for her but nev- ertheless irritated. The world was full of women who felt as she did and who said nothing about it. But soft cushions and fine seams do not breed any sort of strength.

Marcia pushed back the jet-black curling hair away from her moist forehead. "It is worry that is killing me!" she went on. "I ought not to be worried now—and Dick would never forgive it! I know he wouldn't! I know it!"

Barrett waited. She was leading up to something that she meant to ask. He knew her ways all too well.

"What particularly," he probed as gently as he could, "is worrying you, Marcia?"

She wiped the palms of her small hands on a handkerchief before she spoke. "The idea of your telling Elinor about—Gerald!" she stated.

He made no answer. Rather stupidly he fumbled for his cigaret case, brought it forth and lit a cigaret. Then he puffed deeply, staring absorbedly at the small prick of heat from which the faint blue smoke rose lazily into the heavy air. He had had no intention of telling Gerald's story to Elinor, yet he did not want to promise Marcia that he would never tell her. A time might come when Elinor would ask questions and have every right to know the truth.

"She would—talk!" Marcia went on, her voice low and pulsating.

"No, Marcia. She wouldn't."

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The woman laughed acidly. "No?" she murmured with a lingering, upward inflection. She lay back. "I hope I shall die!" she said. "I think I can easily by not wanting to live. I do not want to live under this threat which you continue to hold over me!"

"Is that quite fair?" he asked, knowing he was acting a fool in trying to reason with her.

Again she sat upright. "Is it fair," she demanded bitterly, "for me to pay and pay and pay for the fact that I was a child—a trusting child—craving warmth and held down by an old man who knew nothing of the needs of my nature? And I believed you," she ended with a change of tone, "when you said you would help me!"

"Haven't I tried to help you?" Barrett asked.

"Go! Go now and tell her!" Marcia exclaimed. She began to tear at the small cushions with hands that found strength in her frenzy. Wrenching sobs shook her. She clutched at her hair, tore it and set teeth on her wrist. Barrett caught her hands and held them. It was no easy job with her maddened struggling. "Hush!" he ordered. "Do you want to hear what I'm going to say to you?"

"Not unless—unless—!" she wailed.

"You won't!" he said loudly. Her sobs died. "You are so ill," he began, "that I can not let you work yourself into one of these frenzies. You are ill because you have indulged your wish for heat and idleness but that doesn't change the matter. I have to give in to you. And I do, but against my will. I promise you that I will not tell Elinor the truth about Gerald no matter what she thinks of me. Does that satisfy you?"

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He dropped her hands, stood away.

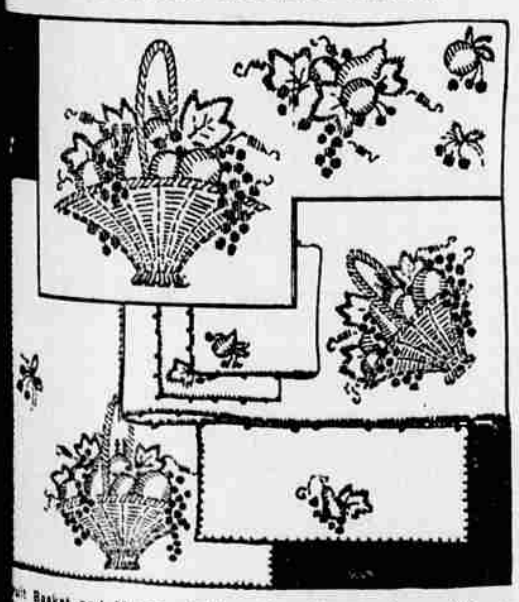
"Darling!" she murmured, smiling up at him with lips that trembled.

He shook his head. She had forced him to make a promise that might do away with any possibility of understanding between him and Elinor. He had wanted, above all things, that Elinor should respect him. She might now, misunderstanding, learn to loathe him, to think of him with a shudder.

"It is most unfair of you Marcia," he said slowly. He moved toward the hall.

(To Be Continued)

FRUIT MOTIFS ENHANCE LINENS



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