

BARGAIN BRIDE

by KATHARINE HAVLAND-TAYLOR

CHAPTER XXXII

"Barry!" she called, appealing. For the first time in his life he did not answer to her call. She rose as quickly as she could to follow him.

"Where are you going?" she exclaimed.

"To my wife," he answered sternly. "I haven't said one word about—my happiness—she murmured. He smiled grimly. She had, perhaps, misheard several words which he had uttered. Time would prove that.

Marcia was weeping when Dick arrived. She had felt very ill all day, and she was frightened. He drew her into his arms. Somehow, he added, voice breaking, Barry's marriage had upset her.

Dick Radnor muttered his comment. His hand moved over Marcia's hair. "You've hated the Stafford family's dishonesty, paraded in the way they tried to deceive old Miss Sexton in order to get her money, haven't you?"

She sobbed deeply and he held her. "We don't understand that sort of thing, do we, dear?" he ended. Her "No" was hysterical, too loud. Then suddenly she smiled, relaxed. Barry never broke a promise and Dick had promised her that he would never tell Elinor the truth about Gerald.

WHEN Barry arrived home that afternoon he heard music. Someone was playing the piano beautifully. It was, of course, Elinor. He forgot the promise Marcia had exacted from him—a vow which, if kept, might have untold difficulties. Barry knew that and yet he knew that he would keep it.

What was Elinor playing? Something haunting. He slipped from his coat in the slow, fumbling manner of the preoccupied. From the door of the hall, Higgins came forward, his voice reduced to a whisper. "Mr. Barrett, the cook and the maids wanted to hear the music. I left the doors open to the rear of the house. Is that all right?"

"Perfectly all right. I'm sure Mrs. Colvin would be glad to have them listen if they enjoy it."

"Thank you, sir. And, Mr. Barrett, it isn't too presuming for me to ask it, would you tell Mrs. Colvin how much we have enjoyed her playing?"

"I certainly will, Higgins."

"Thank you, sir."

Higgins took Barry's hat and coat and Barry pushed open the drawing room door. Elinor rose, seeing him. He flushed slightly. "I wasn't expecting you so soon," she confessed. He crossed the room quickly. "It's ten years," he said, "since there has been any music in this house." The tone of his voice told her that he had missed it.

"What was that you were playing as I came in?" he asked. He was so absorbed that he forgot to be self-conscious.

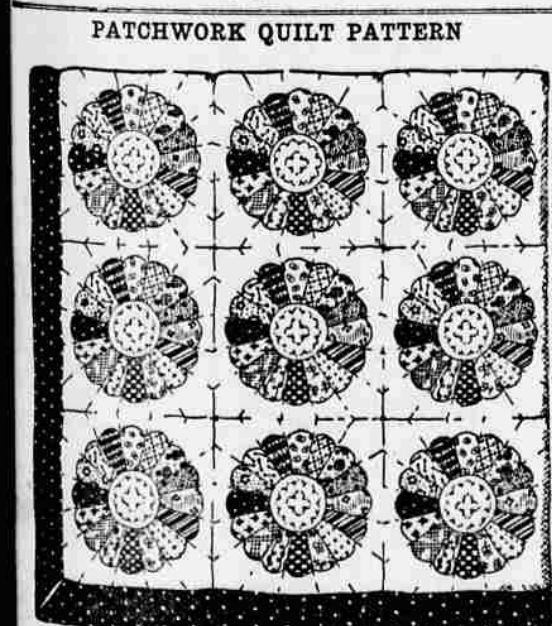
"Oh, that? Something by Nevin. I've forgotten what it's called." She smiled herself again and began to finger the melody. He leaned his arms on the piano, looking down at her as she played the strain that had captured him.

"That's it," he murmured. "It is sweet."

"Very."

Her hands grew still and he said quickly, "Please don't stop."

"What do you like?" he told her. Higgins entered silently with the ten years to the strains of Victor Herbert's "Gypsy Sweetheart." Higgins thought the young couple made a charming picture—the girl looking up,



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smiling, and the man listening eagerly. At length Barrett said, "Come! The tea's been here a long while and you must be tired!"

"But I'm not, truly!" she assured him. "I love to play!"

"I hadn't realized how much I've missed hearing music," he commented as he moved across the room. She sat in the chair behind the tea table and he took his place near her in a low chair that abutted the fire.

"Music makes you forget your troubles," he went on.

"Yes, if they aren't too deep. This is the first time I've played since father was hurt." It was true but it was not the whole truth. She had not, until an hour ago, touched a piano since Barrett Colvin had kissed to ride away.

"Yet it's a good anesthetic," he went on.

She agreed, putting two lumps of sugar and a slice of lemon in his teacup. Remembering this preference of his brought back pictures of the old, shakily ecstatic days—pictures that were too clear for comfort.

It chilled her definitely, though she did not know why. Certainly, she reflected, she had not dreamed that her arrangement could become permanent. She had said again and again to the unruly mind chamber that housed her dreams, "You mustn't consider that for a second!" She was too inexperienced to know that dreams denied sometimes thrive lustily while those indulged frequently may wear thin.

"You know," she said slowly, "that you can have your freedom whenever you want it. I've been terrified by the thought of your—falling in love with someone during this time—"

"I am not going to fall in love," he assured her almost harshly. Then he laughed. "Isn't it quite the modern touch to have a wife speak of giving her husband his freedom on the afternoon of their wedding day?"

She, too, laughed, but the words "wife" and "husband" had made her cheeks flush.

"Besides, I don't happen to want—freedom," he stated next.

"You're very gallant," she murmured.

He denied that with a somewhat stern. "No, I'm afraid you will have to look elsewhere for gallantry. I've never been able to do anything more interesting than telling the truth. I do—that."

"So do I," she said. The words sounded flatly definite. Barrett reflected that unless one knew her very well as he did, it would certainly have been easy to be deceived by those words. A good many men, he supposed, had been deceived by her and by her mother. Himself among them!

"Older men are always interested in Elinor. She makes them feel young and then laughs about it afterward."

"That was what Lida, the girl's mother, had said. He remembered the way she had added, "I shall not have to cough loudly as I near a room where you are alone with Elinor."

"There's one thing," Barrett said heavily. "While we are, at least to the world, married, we'll both have to play fair. No flirtations on either side. I am afraid. I would be rather ugly about—such affairs."

Her eyes were on his, wide and wondering. "Of course not!" she agreed bluntly. "Do you think I would take all you've given me without doing all I can to deserve it?"

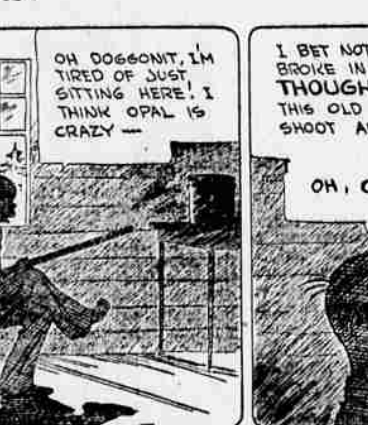
He stared at her steadily, measuring. She was really a marvel, he decided. The world had lost an actress when he had gained a wife.

(To Be Continued)

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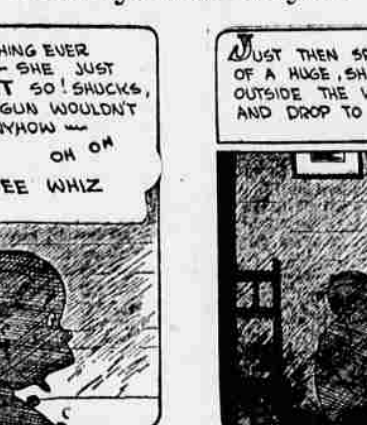
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It aint laziness! I'S GASOLINE HEART. I GOT IT BAD, TOO! WHENEVER I GIT VERY FAR FROM A RIDE—I MEAN, TH' SMELL OF GASOLINE—WHY, MY LEGS GIT WEAK, BREATHIN' IS HARD, AND I PERSPIRE—YOU GO AHEAD—I GOT TO BE VERY CAREFUL WITH THIS GASOLINE HEART.

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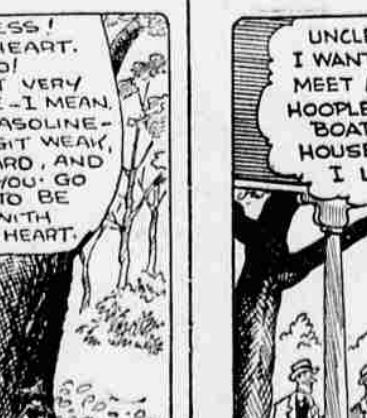
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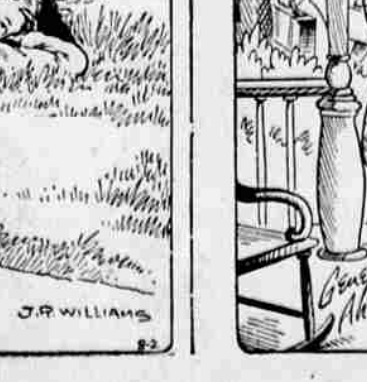
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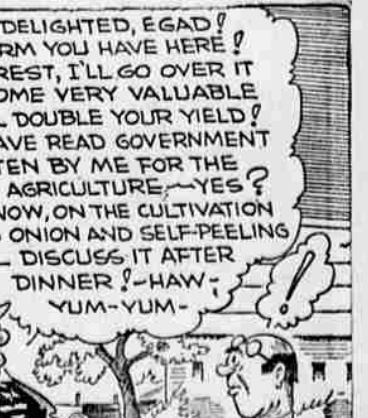
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