

BARGAIN BRIDE

KARMAINE HAYLAND-TAYLOR

CHAPTER XLIV

thought of those mornings after the death when he, waking, found first what troubled him and then remembered with aching suddenness the bride who had been his.

"You will," she assured him suavely. "I shall be happy to explain." Learning gracefully against the balustrade that guarded the terrace from the sheer drop, she spoke of Gerald and the woman in Connecticut. "I know only the bare facts now," she admitted as she finished speaking, "but I can easily fill in the gaps of the tale—if I need to fill those gaps—"

That, Barrett realized, meant having Marcia's story broadcast to the world. He stood with teeth set on his lower lip and scowled at the clustered lights in the hollow, lights that he did not see.

The tale might mean the end of Elinor's happiness, for he had promised Marcia that he would not tell Elinor the true story.

She laid a hand on his arm and at the touch he drew back. "I'm not going to be unreasonable," she said smoothly, "but I do like to think that when I really need help I can come to dear Elinor's husband—"

"Suppose we omit flowers," he suggested dryly. "I asked how much you want for silence."

Lida admitted that she really did need a little help. Things had gone so badly for her in a financial way. "But I think I could manage with \$30,000," she told him.

After a moment's consideration he promised her his check.

"Suppose," Lida suggested sweetly, "we attend to it now?"

Smiling ironically Barrett agreed. They were in the living room and he had just given her the check when Elinor appeared in the doorway.

"Inopportune!" Lida murmured. She trailed off languidly. Elinor's expression showed mild surprise but nothing more than that. Barrett understood that her sense of loss was so great she scarcely noticed anything around her.

He drew her arm through his. "Come outside," he urged. "I want to talk to you."

Miss Hemmingway had said, "Divert her. Do all you can to divert her thoughts."

She went with him without objection. They were to leave for New York the next day. After that her father would be gone for all time! Elinor could not forget that she had clung to him at her aunt's funeral. She had felt that she and her father—alone of the large group—shared the same emotions. Perhaps her father was the only person who would ever understand her, the only soul who would ever comprehend those needs that can not be voiced. A hunger for trust was one of them. She could not feel that Barrett—thoughtful as he was—quite trusted her. And love without trust was not love at all.

He settled with her in a broad, low, cretonne covered awing. Dropping an arm around her shoulders, he drew her close.

"Mind that?" he asked.

"No."

"Have you ever been to Cuba?" he wanted to know.

She said she had not.

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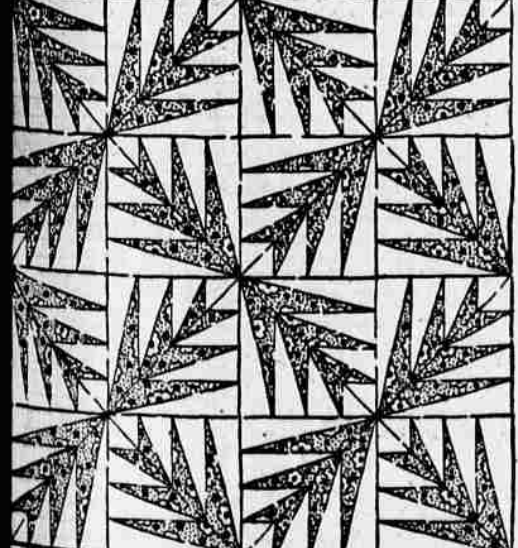
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