

NICE CHILD

A SHORT STORY

by

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Marcia Carter Doubted Her Husband, So She Set Out to Get Her Share of Life Also.

MARCIA CARTER had been married a whole year. Looking backward that Saturday afternoon a year seemed a terrible long time to have listened to a set line of adulation or chastisement, as the case might be.

Bob was adorable, much more so than any of her friends' husbands, and Marcia appreciated him but she could not keep from becoming restless on Saturday afternoons lately.

She dreaded them and the certain telephone call from the Willow Catering concern where Bob had been employed so long.

Somebody was bound to throw a party Saturday night which necessarily forced Bob to work extra late.

Marcia's four rooms were beautiful, cool and appropriate.

A radio was near the large front window; an upholstered living room suite and davenport table were cor-

sight and those who might recognize her in the same way.

The coast was clear when she stepped up to the window to purchase a ticket.

"Two fronts," a mellow masculine voice drowned Marcia's and she looked up, indignant.

A slow confident smile played about the eyes of the stranger and quieted Marcia.

She had always said that she was masher-proof but here she went, into the theater guided by a soft voice and a delicate clasp on her arm.

"Surely no harm, lady," he smiled down on Marcia.

Ye gods, Bob couldn't smile like that in a thousand years!

"Well, unconventional is a better name, I guess," Marcia replied but she went on down the aisle.

The stranger spoke when they were seated.

hand followed hers.

"I have to go now," Marcia stammered, rising.

He was surprised and his arched brows showed it.

"Surely you don't mind me! I didn't mean to be presumptuous—rather not too much so, but you—you are so adorable!" he told her.

"Yes, thank you—maybe I'll see you again," her agitation was growing and he arose and bowed her out.

The car was at the curb when she went out and she went directly up to it.

"Well, you sure know how to take your time. Must not be very anxious to keep a date with me, the first date, too," the driver of the sporty roadster complained as they drove away.

"Oh, Bill, let's don't argue, please!" Marcia cried.

"Who was that fellow carried you in there, anyhow?" Bill demanded.

Marcia gasped. Where had Bill been spying?

Bill went on speaking:

"Just because I been hanging around six months trying to get you, don't think I'm going to take a whole lot of skeegee, 'cause I'm not, brownskin."

Marcia's illusions were fading leaving Bill, the man for whom she had cherished a secret admiration the last half year, in bold relief a good looking but coarse mannered guy.

"Now, Bill, don't take too much for granted, and just because I consented to go with you tonight in case Bob worked doesn't mean that I belong to you," Marcia said icily.

"Come down, baby, before I bring you down. You know I'm wild about you, Marcia. I'm going to take you away from Bob Carter as sure as he's a waiter. You watch me."

Bill was not bad looking and girls liked him, probably these virtues brought him to Marcia's notice.

Men naturally looked at Marcia whenever they had a chance, but Bill, by being Bob's bosom friend, had had the better chance and was making use of it.

Bob had ventured to trust Bill alone with Marcia while he stepped down to the corner for a box of matches the night before.

Everything was just as he had left when he returned a few minutes later.

Not even did he notice Marcia's heightened color, she was naturally a pinkish brown.

But now he would die if he knew Marcia was out on Butler pike with Bill Adams and the car was parked beside the road.

"You know I think you're just a blamed cheat, Marcia Carter!" Bill raged and tried to hold the agitating little body.

"I don't care what you think! You might have given me time to learn to care for you, you cad. Now take me home."

"Ah, no. This night you belong to me. Marcia, please be quiet," he pleaded, growing nervous, "be quiet and let me talk to you, child. You don't know what Bob may be doing. Come on, love Bill. Bill's going to treat you right, quit every girl I ever went with, do anything to prove how much I want you, Marcia."

This sudden passiveness struck Marcia.

Pity in great gulps came for this good looking, uncouth man.

"Well, you might have told me that, first," she murmured petulantly and sank back as he released her.

"Everybody thinks I'm nice, Bill," she told him bluntly.

"Well, you are nice, honey. Wanting me can't make you not be nice, and you do want me, don't you Marcia?"

This bold assumption stunned Marcia and still she could not deny its truth.

She wanted him but she knew she couldn't have him.

She belonged to Bob and right now she should be with him but her

heart at that moment would not leave dejected Bill.

In the dim flare of a passing motorist's light Marcia glimpsed the fire in Bill's eyes, she surveyed the chin above which the full lips twitched.

His heavy arm lay inertly on the seat back, behind her shoulders.

Conversation had drifted into a miserable silence.

"Bill. Take me home, please," Marcia whispered and drew closer to warn him of shallow ground.

"I'll die first!" he cried and crushed her frightened self to his breast, passionately.

Conscience was dying a terrible death, Marcia's arms were stealing upward and around the neck of the pleading man when a great flare of headlights came around the curve.

The bus flashed by just as the two sprang apart in time to read "Willow Catering, Inc." in electric across the body.

"I'll be damned!" Bill gasped.

Marcia began to cry.

"Oh, I'm ruined now!" she wailed.

Bill was skeptical of her remark.

"Well—I haven't ruined you," he laughed nervously and started the motor. "I'll try to beat them to town."

Marcia cried all the way in despite Bill's pleading.

"Now, Marcia, we got to figure out some way to be together. We care too much for each other to let it go to seed, baby!" Bill told her as they neared her street.

Marcia was silent and Bill raved on.

"Next Saturday you get in a sidge to go to Louisville to see your people. I'll catch the train at Sewickley and we'll let up down the road somewhere. Sunday night you go on to Louisville and I'll beat it back here to my job Monday morning."

They were two blocks away from Marcia's house now and he pulled in at the shady curb.

Marcia had been silently resenting the man's amazing cocksureness and repaling herself for a mighty fool.

This man against sturdy old Bob. She alighted quickly and leaned forward to whisper.

"Bill, I'm sorry, but try to pick up your girl again because if I beat Bob home it's all off with you!"

And how she ran, leaving the cursing Bill to subside alone.

She was sitting in negligee, reading a true story ten minutes later when Bob's key turned in the lock.

Like a frightened child her face sought his for one trace of anger and upon finding none she leaped playfully into his open arms.

"I didn't believe you'd go anywhere, you blessed little scared thing!" Bob cried smothering her face with kisses and brushing the soft hair from his eyes.

"Ugh-h-h!" Marcia snuggled closer, shuddering.

"Daddy going to take it on a nice long trip. Going to be off a week now and take it to see its muver down to Louisville, and on to North Carolina to see its new kinsfolk," Bob patted.

He looked down into her face and saw the brave but futile effort to hold two tears in check.

He lifted her small body from the floor, inwardly cursing himself for neglecting her and swearing to be guilty of that no more.

"Marcia, don't cry," he begged.

Little by little the sobbing subsided and Bob returned to the bedroom with his precious burden.

She was tired.

He watched the eyelids flutter sleepily, saw the rosebud lips pucker for a good night kiss and all the pride one man can hold inflated him as his lips closed passionately down on those inviting ones.

"Lord, I do humbly thank you for my sweet, nice child!" he murmured, high burbling with ecstasy and went about retiring.

THE END

Samuel Martin, a benevolent slaveholder of color residing at Port Gibson, Mississippi, purchased his own freedom in 1829.

In 1814, 5,547 free Negroes in Virginia paid \$8,332 in taxes, and in 1863 they paid \$13,063.22 in poll taxes.

John B. Russwurm was the first Negro to receive a degree from a college in the United States. He began in 1827 the publication of the Freedom's Journal. This was the first Negro newspaper published in this country.



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rectly placed and flimsy marquisette criss-cross curtains were at each of the three windows.

Bob had taken the house and furnished it according to Marcia's directions before the wedding, and then when she came on with him from Louisville following the brilliant wedding she found every detail minutely carried out.

She had been so happy, in fact she was happy now but as the phone began to tinkle she dragged herself across the room, resigned to imminent unhappiness.

"Marcia Carter." Her name sounded hollow.

"Nothing surprising about that," she answered his information.

"No, I'm not angry Bob, I'm—"

"What? Oh, no, you can't help it," she tried to be sweet.

"Yes, I'm listening."

"Oh, just out."

"Sure. Haven't I always been nice, Bob?"

"Well, I'm sorry you object—but I'm going just the same. I'm not going to read a darn line. I'm going somewhere!"

She knew Bob had meant to say some more but in her excited anger she hung up just as his positive voice began something.

They had never quarreled about anything although they had not agreed on every subject.

One was in the air now and Marcia shuddered to think of what it might bring about.

After she had cried down two coats of powder and brushed her hair on the divan pillows a time or two she regarded herself insolently.

"I'm no child!"

"Nice child, nice fool is better. Bob could be lying to me every Saturday night." She bit her lower lip to repel the ugly doubts that welled up.

"Well, sink or swim, here goes," she declared and went to get her coat and hat.

Marcia looked like a million dollars when she tripped out her door up Center avenue.

It was not far to the Elmore theater but Marcia had not been there alone.

Emma and Susie and Katherine told her she was a fool and was only spoiling Bob Carter and herself, too.

She smiled and wondered what they would say when she told them about her rebellion.

She looked through the crowd and tried to dodge those she knew by

"Now whom have I the honor—?"

"Mrs. Robert Carter, and you—?"

"Ethebert Bayne. Isn't that a crime?" he laughed and Marcia was reminded of softly falling April showers.

But she could not afford to become sentimental minded, absorbed or dominated by this strange man.

What if Bob should come in and find her here or somebody else who claimed a right to care!

The actors were marionettes so far as Marcia was concerned.

She didn't care for shows so much anyway and she had no intention of spending more than ten minutes in this one.

But what could she do with the handsome Ethebert Bayne?

"Do you like our town, Mr. Bayne?" she had to say something.

An almost nude girl was pirouetting in the center of the stage, singing an exciting love song and Marcia tried to talk and to keep Bayne talking.

"I like your town, now," the debonaire one replied.

The song ended and the lights came on.

Marcia wanted to get away and she wanted to stay, she was afraid of this man as she had never been afraid of another.

His hands were too soft as they closed over hers and they had no earthly business closing over hers, anyway.

Marcia tried to jerk hers up in a way to make his stay put but involuntarily it seemed that soft right

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