

Bargain Bride

by KATHARINE HAVILAND-TAYLOR

BEGIN HERE TODAY

BARRETT COLVIN, 28, returns to New York after four years' absence. He is rich and has made a name for himself as an architect. The first to greet him is his half-sister, MARCIA RADNOR, younger, selfish and spoiled. MARCIA is happily married now. Years before Barrett absented her when a youthful flirtation ended disastrously. Marcia had a son whom Barrett adopted. She is worried because the boy's tutor has threatened her with blackmail and declares her husband will never forgive her if he learns the truth. Barrett agrees to deal with the tutor, HAROLD DEXTER.

As Marcia is leaving she sees ELINOR STAFFORD across the street and orders to drive her home. Elinor, 26 and very pretty, has been calling on her wealthy aunt, MISS ELLA SEXTON. Barrett had known the girl as a child and is amazed to see how beautiful she has become.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER II

BARRETT COLVIN turned impatiently to his desk. It was ridiculous of him to keep thinking of the girl. In an effort to put her out of his mind he opened and scanned a letter or two.

A few years ago he had thought that if the small group who understood his work felt it was good his ambition would be reached. Now here he was—reading all these words of praise and instead of feeling pleased he was wondering what it would be like to take a girl of Elinor Stafford's sort to dinner or the theater.

He poked bills into pigeon holes, decided to get rid of Dexter promptly and as soon as he could to make a trip to the Connecticut farm house where his ward lived.

Probably, Barrett reflected, he would bore such a girl as Elinor Stafford. He had always despised middle-aged men who devoted themselves to young girls. Why the devil was he giving the matter so much thought, anyhow? There wasn't a chance in a hundred of his taking this particular girl anywhere. Of course he might happen to meet her at Miss Ella's—

He pushed aside the letter he was reading, disgusted with himself. He wrote his age, 35, on the desk blotter. Elinor Stafford was 19 or 20 he judged. Of course she would marry some youngster, some youth in her own set. She would have a home, children, all that she should have. Lord but the house seemed quiet!

She had such gentle eyes. She would be very sweet with children. Barrett rose suddenly, wishing he were back in the desert, wrangling with some native who would not have sacred ground disturbed—for the price offered. Dreaming of a bathtub and tramping the sands of time from the shin bone of a dinosaur. But he wasn't in the desert and, until things cleared up—the question of Gerald's future settled and Marcia's baby born—he would not go on any expedition, no matter how tempting.

Again Barrett Colvin settled at his desk. Then he drew back sharply. Beneath the figure "35" he had written "19 or 20."

MARCIA, meantime, turned to look at Elinor Stafford. "She has young beauty," Marcia thought. "Real beauty muted by the wrong sort of clothes." A girl with Elinor's coloring and her chestnut brown hair should not, of course, wear gray tweeds. With her youthful slimness and slightly angular lines she needed softness. Perhaps, Marcia reflected with that keenness women have in measuring one another, it was Elinor's mother who was responsible for the girl's ill-chosen costume. That would be exactly like Lida Stafford. Yes, indeed!

"You were calling on your aunt?" Marcia questioned. She was only making conversation. Mentally Marcia was telling herself that she must bring Barry to her point of view about the boy.

"Yes," Elinor answered in her usually shy way.

"I hope she is as well as usual?" Marcia went on. Of course she knew Miss Sexton's relatives could not really be wishing any such thing. How they had hovered, like human vultures, around the autistic and acid old lady who made the changing of her will a favorite indoor sport!

"She's quite well, thank you, Mrs. Radnor. She saw you drive up and spoke of how well you were looking."

Marcia's expression became slightly strained. She had always suspected that Miss Ella Sarton knew more than anyone else about the secrets of Marcia's past. Miss Ella had piercing eyes and a suspicious, inquisitive turn of mind. How Marcia had flushed 16 years before when Miss Ella had beckoned her across the way from the old house to say, "I saw you riding in the park—"

Those brittle paths and Len Moore riding behind her—when people were near. She had been a little fool but so hungry for romance. There had been little of it in the great house ruled by her stern father.

AND now, why had young Dexter, the boy's companion-tutor, come to her? But Barry would fit that. Barry always did fit things. Half of his acquaintances must owe him money! Oh, of course Barry must come around to her point of view. Getting the child away, far away, was the only wise thing to do. Somewhere in South America,

perhaps. Completely away from everyone they knew.

"Has there been much going on for you young people?" Marcia asked, suddenly remembering the girl beside her.

"I don't know, Mrs. Radnor. I haven't—many friends."

"Why, that's not right! You're really, Elinor, quite sweet."

The gratitude that flashed in Elinor Stafford's eyes took Marcia for a second beyond her troubled self. She laid a hand upon the girl's.

"Child," she said quickly. "I'm going to be home-bound soon and perhaps you'll be good enough to come to see me once in a while." Again Elinor's eyes raised. The girl was obviously pitifully lonely. Marcia continued, "We'll find something amusing to do—"

"I'd love it, Mrs. Radnor!" Elinor answered with young intensity.

"Well then, that's that. You live on Park Avenue, don't you?"

"Yes, but—" Elinor faltered, "I was on my way down town. Would you mind dropping me somewhere near Washington Square if it's not out of your way?"

"Not at all!" Marcia answered. "Are you going in for artists, my dear? Personally I think they're rather over-done."

The girl did not answer for a moment and when Marcia turned she saw that Elinor was flushed. Marcia laughed delightedly. "You shy child!" she broke out. "I think you're having an affair!"

"Oh, no, really!"

Marcia thought, amused, "Heaven, how embarrassed she is!"

"Mrs. Radnor," Elinor added quickly, "I would rather not have anyone know that you dropped me down town."

"No one shall know. I'm absurdly kind about keeping secrets," Marcia assured her.

"I know you would be!" the girl said with a grateful look.

MARCIA flushed a trifle, but only a trifle. The flush showed with but a hint of warmth beneath her gardenia skin. Secrets and keeping them—how she loathed them! How Dick loathed them! He would never forgive her, never! But she mustn't let herself brood over such things. The doctor had said, "Keep cheerful." An easy order! As if one could do it—at will! Marcia was impatient with the whole world, doctors included.

"Did you know I'm going to have a baby?" she asked.

"No, I didn't," Elinor answered. "You must be very, very happy!"

"You are a dear!" said Marcia warmly. "Yes, I am. But most of my friends don't feel that way. They say, 'Poor darling!' as though it were something calling for sympathy. That's the usual reaction."

"I think it's a most unpleasant reaction."

"Yes, isn't it?" Marcia drawled easily, carelessly. There was a silence.

"I think I'll leave at the next corner, please, and I thank you so much," Mrs. Radnor said for asking me to come to see you, too—"

"Darling, I'll love to have you," Marcia responded. Speaking into the tube she told Jensen to stop the car.

After Elinor had disappeared in the crowd and the car was moving on again Marcia wondered about the girl and why she wanted her trip down town kept a secret. Marcia rather hoped the youngster wasn't concerned in anything disagreeable. Elinor was so young. So much could come to one who was so young, so much one was not ready yet for which one was eager! Marcia closed her eyes for a little time. She drew a deep breath. If Dick ever knew, he would never forgive her—Dick who was a fanatic about the truth.

Elinor turned into a side street that had once been an alley. The moist, chill of the day had touched it. Grays were deeper, cobble alleys, puddles were raw stretches on which were printed the untidy habits of those who passed—a bit of orange peeling floating here, there an envelope or scraps of a torn letter.

The building into which she turned was old and marked by the hard years it had known. Stairs tilted forward, their edges splintered. A woman pushed aside a bucket without raising her head as Elinor went by her. Elinor's was a "Thank you" made her look up with dull and wondering surprise. At the head of the third floor stair Elinor tapped upon a worn door. "It's I, Philip," she said.

(To Be Continued)

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Girls who take a flip attitude seldom get ahead

GAD'S TRIPPER

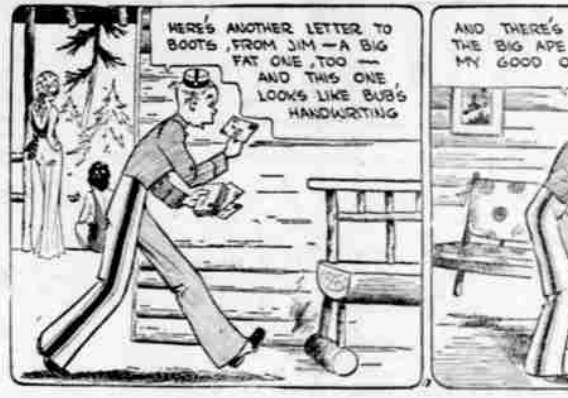
OUT OUR WAY



SALESMAN SAM



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



WASH TUBBS



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



THE NEWFANGLES—MOM'N POP



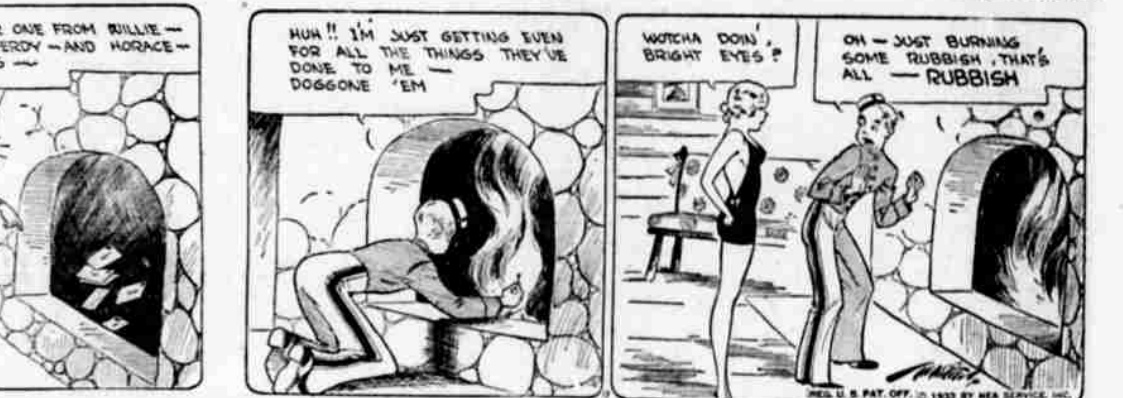
OUR BOARDING HOUSE



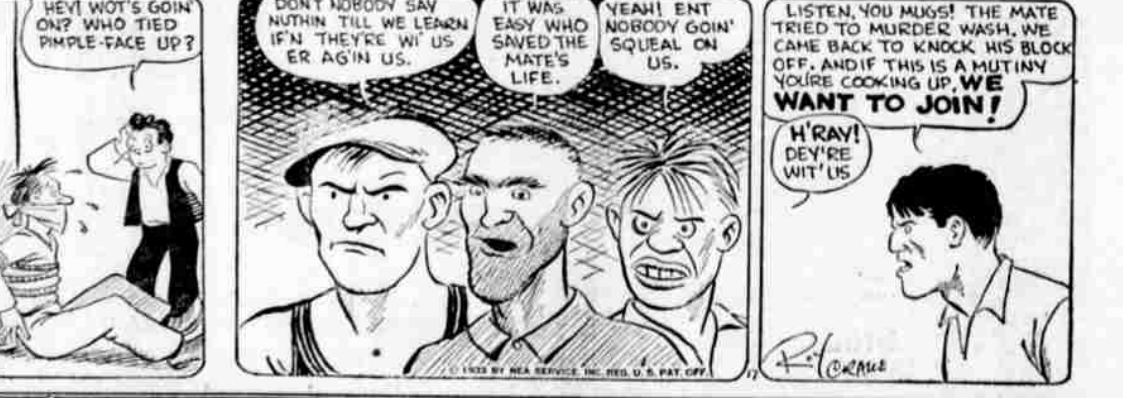
By Small



By Martin



By Crane



By Blosser



By Cowan

