

Bargain Bride

by KATHARINE HAVILAND-TAYLOR

BEGIN HERE TODAY

HARRIET COLVIN, back in New York after four years, and a small amount attracted by the 20-year-old ELLINOR STAFFORD, who had a name for herself as a socialite. Ellinor's mother, LIDA STAFFORD, is beautiful and because she wants attention for herself, has always forced her daughter to wear unbecomingly old-fashioned and keep in the background. Lida schemes constantly to keep in the good graces of her husband's wealthy aunt, MISS ELLA SEXTON, in order to have a share of the Sexton fortune.

Harricot's half-sister, MARCEL, tells her she is terrible for fear her husband will leave her for an unfortunate episode in his past. Years before, Harricot, a spoiled child, when a young girl, had a son, whom she named ELLINOR. The boy is now a young man and his father, HARRY BENTWELL, has threatened Marcel with blackmail. She declares that if her husband leaves her, she will never forgive her.

Harricot goes to visit nine-year-old GERALD, her ward. He decides to discharge the tutor and find a new home for the boy. He goes to see Miss Ella Sexton, who tells him she can not decide to whom to leave her money. Harricot refuses to advise her. As he is leaving he meets Lida Stafford, Ellinor's mother. She suggests his interest in her daughter and determines to put a stop to it.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER VI

THERE was no sign in Lida Stafford's smiling face that Harricot's words had aroused her. She said warmly, "How charming of you! Please do come. I've been anxious about Ellinor lately and the sort of young men she seems to prefer. I'd like to have her know you!"

That, Lida thought with satisfaction, was a start and a good one. She wasn't going to have Harricot Colvin paying attention to her daughter. It would completely spoil her plans. Lida wanted to cultivate Harricot because she knew Aunt Ella thought highly of him. Winning his friendship would impress Aunt Ella, who had the old-fashioned notion that marriage should provide a clear and devoted view of one's husband and blindness to all others.

Furthermore, Harricot Colvin was attractive and Lida was not ready to believe any attractive man could prefer her daughter to herself.

She was sure that her words had found their mark. She had seen the stiffening of Harricot's honest face. The thing to do, Lida decided a few moments later as she waited in the airless reception room for Miss Ella, was to make Harricot feel that there was no redeeming Ellinor. He was credulous as a child. It would be easy to convince him that Ellinor was a member of the wild younger set. Oh, yes, she knew just how to manage it! And a man of his sort that would be enough.

Lida moved restlessly. Would the old lady ever come? Harricot Colvin had said she was well. Only that morning the manager of a small, select gown shop had asked insistently, listing several purchases. "Your cousin, Miss Sexton—is she well?" The woman's glance had been chilly and it had held a question, too. All those unpaid bills. So many people waiting for the death of the indefatigable old lady.

"So trying—the whole affair!" Lida thought.

MISS SMYTHE entered then. "I am sorry," she said (and Lida knew she was not sorry). "Miss Sexton has gone to the city and begs to be excused."

Insolence, Lida decided, but she smiled as she rose, drawing her fur coat closer about her soft, white throat. One had to smile up at Miss Smythe.

"I'll look in tomorrow if that suits," Lida murmured in her sweetest way.

"I will ask Miss Sexton to telephone you," Miss Smythe answered.

Lida thought, "Poisonous Victorian tramp!" Was it possible that Miss Smythe had heard about her affair with Vance Carter? Had Beattie or Jim Thrope talked? How Lida hated them! Miss Smythe said her child, "Good afternoon," and then opened the door. Lida found herself outside in the thickening light of an autumn late afternoon. She had promised to meet Vance—but was it safe? She hesitated, glanced over her shoulder at the brown stone house, then gave a low-order to the chauffeur. He started the car, a cynical smile in his wise eyes.

As they moved away Lida opened her purse, drew out a vanity case and with practiced, automatic gestures began to freshen the rouge on her lips. She had no respect for Vance Carter but he was useful to her. When his hungry eyes followed her Lida knew her power. After sending him away she would find herself assured of her charm and beauty. Retaining that beauty had become to Lida the most important thing in the world.

She considered Vance as rather amusingly simple. She knew that he dreamed of marrying her when she could divorce Bentwell. Thinking of this made her smile in a manner in which she never smiled in public. Vance had an income of \$30,000 a year and Lida was married to what she called "poverty."

Marry Vance on \$50,000 a year? Well, hardly!

SHE was able to manage him easily, however. Miss Ella did not approve of divorced persons and Vance's mind was the sort that could comprehend waiting and trying to one who must some day die with the hope of benefiting financially by that death. Vance had for 10 years gone each Sunday to a Fifth Avenue church with the aunt who had left him his income. He and his friends considered it a good joke, laughing uproariously at it. Lida rode toward their meeting place with a feeling of oppression. Had some sneak reported to the old lady about her (Lida's) visit to Ted Langdon's studio? Or her meetings with Vance? Lida knew that she was menaced but she could not tell whether the danger was large or small.

"I'll get out at the next corner, Grier," she told the chauffeur. She had to be so careful! The tea room she entered a moment later was an inconspicuous one. It was crowded now and Lida felt the admiration and wonder of many eyes turned her way to linger. Vance had reserved a table in a booth. He crossed the room and said, looking down on her, "I thought you'd never come!"

She smiled as they moved toward the booth to settle side by side. He pulled her gloves from her hands. She sighed, relaxed. "So tired!" she murmured. Vance's voice dropped to a whisper. "Darling one!" he said, leaning toward her. He was a satisfactory admirer—dark, slim, showing the worldly weariness that was his in bold, shadowed eyes.

"I've come from Aunt Ella's. She did not receive me—and it hurt!"

"Lord! Fancy not seeing you if one could!" he murmured. He groped beneath the table for her hand.

"I have endured Bentwell for so many years in order to avoid hurting the old lady," Lida went on. Again she sighed. She felt a pleasant sense of long-suffering saintliness, untouched by the fact that her manner of "enduring" was so extremely vocal that it had, more than once, driven Bentwell to his club to try to forget the lash of her tongue.

VANCE'S hands tightened on her hand violently. For the first time he looked away from her. Stealing a side glance at him she saw his face drawn by emotion. His chin was set. "I can't bear to think of you having to endure anything," he said harshly, unevenly and too loudly. "I want to give you—everything. Lida, I want to take care of you!"

Privately she thought, "On \$50,000!" and found the thought amusing. To him she said, "Vance, you're so sweet! So kind!"

He moved suddenly and again his eyes were upon her, devouring her. Lida saw that he was going to be difficult. It did not frighten her; instead she felt stimulated, enjoying this proof of her charms.

"Vance," she appealed, "baby me! I'm really so pitifully weary. Nothing has gone as it should today. You know how I long for peace and quiet and love and—dear companionship. I've been lonely for years, Vance!"

She raised her large, slate-gray eyes which could fill with synthetic feeling to his face that balked hunger had made stern. For the first time he paid no heed to her appeal.

"Lida," he exclaimed, "I'm tired of it. Meeting you like this for half an hour or so. It's not enough. I can't stand it! You know what I want. You—all your time—everything! Look at me, Lida—sweetest!"

Suddenly then he was silent, leaning away from her, looking away from her. His grip on her hand made a ring cut deep. Lida adored such moments, playing a role and finding warmth from a fire she never felt in her heart.

A few moments later he spoke again, staring down at her lashes, outlined and made ebou by her perfect skin.

"Some day all this will be over, Lida," he promised a little thickly.

She gave him a fleeting glance, shy and warm. She said, "You know my dream, darling."

"Together," he went on. "Oh, Vance, if that only could be!"

"It will be. It must! My God, Lida—"

There was another stretch of silence in which Lida felt the growth of satisfaction in her power. Oh, yes, she could do with him exactly as she wished. Vance worshiped her. Would he do anything she said!

Suddenly he turned. His shoulder pressed against hers. Vance said in a quiet tone, "Almost forgot that I've come news for you!"

(To Be Continued)

OUT OUR WAY

By J. R. Williams OUR BOARDING HOUSE

By Ahern



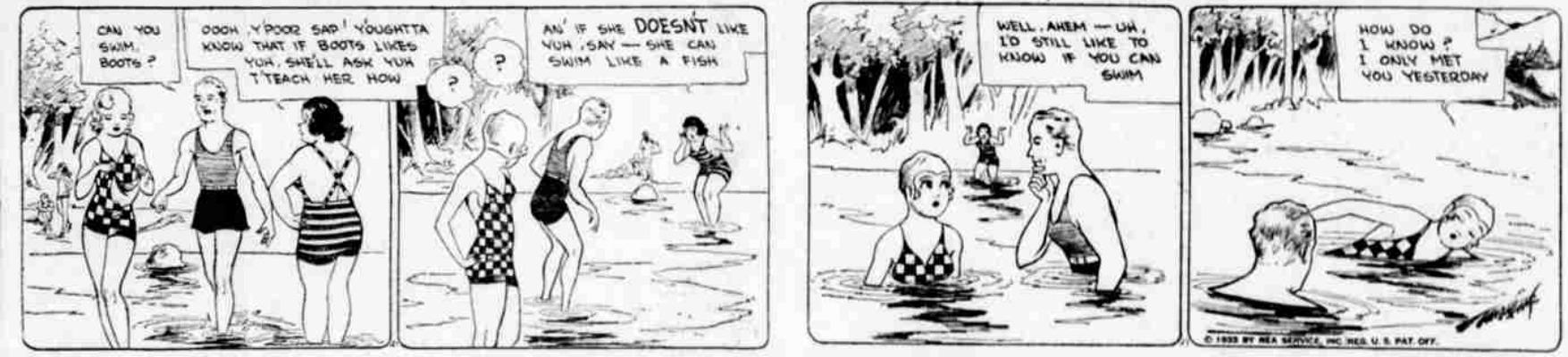
SALESMAN SAM

By Small



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES

By Martin



WASH TUBBS

By Crane



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS

By Blosser



THE NEWFANGLES—MOM'N POP

By Cowan

