

Bargain Bride

by KATHARINE HAVILAND-TAYLOR

BEGIN HERE TODAY

BARRETT COLVIN, back in New York after four years, meets 30-year-old ELLINOR STAFFORD and falls in love with her. Barrett is 35, wealthy and has made a name for himself as an architect.

Ellinor's beautiful mother, LIDA STAFFORD, has kept the girl in the background, waiting attention for herself. Lida is carrying on a flirtation with VANCE CARTER and is constantly scheming to keep in the good graces of MISS ELLA SEXTON, her husband's aunt, in order to inherit a share of the Sexton fortune. Ellinor hates this hypocrisy.

Barrett's half-sister, MARCIA BADNOR, is terrified for her husband will learn of an unfortunate episode in her past. Years before Barrett shielded Marcia when a youthful romance ended disastrously. Marcia had a son whom Barrett adopted. The boy, to nine years old now, Marcia insists that if her husband learns the truth he will never forgive her.

HAROLD DEXTER, the boy's tutor, threatens blackmail. Barrett, knowing of Dexter's past, promises to pay him to keep his mouth shut. Barrett takes Ellinor Stafford for a drive. She seems so attracted toward him as he is toward her.

CHAPTER XI

ELLINOR rose quickly and left the room. She returned, flushed and smiling, from the telephone conversation with Barrett Colvin.

"He wanted," she said, "to know if I didn't think it would be better to take our drive tomorrow since the weather forecast is clear. We were going to go Tuesday."

"Did it take seven minutes for him to say that?" her father asked.

Ellinor laughed. "Oh, but that wasn't all. He said he hoped I hadn't been chilled driving this afternoon and he said he'd never enjoyed an afternoon more and thanked me for it. And I thanked him and said I'd enjoyed it too."

"Twenty in June, weren't you, dearest?" Bentwell asked.

"Yes, but why bring that up?" she replied lightly. She was so happy!

They moved to the room Lida called the library, arm in arm. Stafford's heart was cracking to small, sharp shivers that cut at each beat. He didn't want his little girl to grow up, to fall in love and leave him. But, on the other hand, he did want her settled and away from her mother's bold lies and frail deceptions, from his drinking himself to forgetfulness.

In the big room Ellinor turned to put her arms around his neck. "You mustn't feel sorry," she entreated. "You're first! You'll always be first with me, darling!"

He held her close, laid his cheek against her soft hair. And when she stood away she saw that his eyes were wet. "I'm so foolish!" she admitted. "And I've made you so! Aren't we being rather dramatic over nothing? I don't know what's the matter with me!"

Her father knew what was the matter and the recurring possibility of Colvin's hurting her brought color to his cheeks. "Thank God," he thought, "Lida will be out of the way for a while!" If only they could have everything settled before Lida's return—assuming, of course, that Colvin really cared for Ellinor as she seemed to care for him. Then it would be all right. If the affair were still in the air when Lida returned she could—and would—smash it if she wished. Stafford knew her—her strength, her lack of principle which made her the most formidable of foes, her willingness to stoop to and use any weapon.

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MARCIA had telephoned Barrett. He learned when he arrived home that day—four days later—he was stretched to unnatural length by worry and ecstasy. That the unpleasant interview with Dexter had occurred only that morning he could hardly believe.

"Is that you, Marcia?" he said into the telephone.

"Yes, dear. Thank you so much for calling. I wanted you to know that I've been so relieved and happy since I heard from you at noon."

"I'm glad of that," he answered but he could not feel the situation as he had before; the menace of it, the hopelessness of it. He could feel only the understanding and loveliness and gentleness of the girl who had ridden beside him in the gray of the early evening and the truth that had come to him so suddenly that he was still dizzy from its strong impact.

"Dear," he heard next, "can you run up to have dinner with us? We had an engagement but we begged off."

For the first time in his life Barrett lied expertly. He couldn't talk to Marcia this evening. He had to be alone to think!

He said goodby to her and then telephoned Ellinor.

"Are you dining in, sir?" Higgins questioned a short while later.

"Yes, Higgins," Barrett answered happily. Before he left the room he wrote, "Higgins, candy, pink box" on a day-by-day pad. That it was an absurd and unnecessary reminder he realized, feeling slightly a fool. Nevertheless it was a satisfaction to write it. He stood looking down at the words. She didn't

think he seemed old. He had said, "I usually feel frightfully decrepit when I'm with anyone your age," and she had answered with a bluntness that had elated him. "That's the silliest thing I've ever heard!"

HE had said, "Really do you mean it?" and she had replied, "I certainly do!" They had talked of it for some time; he confessing his hatred of old fools who crashed in on the buds and she was saying that was "quite different." He had admitted his 35 years and she her 20.

And later, over the telephone, she had said she had enjoyed the afternoon. Her voice had been not quite steady and he had wanted to say, "You darling! You darling!" Instead he had only said, "Be sure to dress warmly enough tomorrow."

Barrett looked at the clock; tossed his cigarette into the fire. At this time tomorrow night he would be with her to that pleasant, small inn which Marcia had said was unchanged. He'd telephoned ahead and ordered something special. And wear the London tweeds he liked about as well as anything he had. He decided suddenly that he had been neglecting his wardrobe for a long while. Have to remedy that. See his tailor tomorrow.

Tomorrow seemed a long time away. He studied the laggard clock.

What an adventure coming home would be with her in the house! What a magnet she would be! He saw himself slipping from his coat, hurrying into the drawing room, attempting to take her in his arms. Was it fair to her to dream this way, not knowing how she felt? He must hold himself in a bit. But he had never wanted anything very much without getting it, he reassured himself. He knew he had force, and if he thought he could make her as happy as she should be he would use that force. Then—(together for the rest of their lives!) His lean cheeks warmed, thinking thus.

If she could ever say, "I love you!" he would ask nothing more!

LIDA, in a way, had enjoyed Miami. Vance Carter had been there, as devoted as usual, and she had been amused. True, his infatuation had a few times made him difficult for even her to handle. She had had to make promises she had never intended to keep. These bothered her a trifle, although time, Lida had found, often untangled the webs that follow the first deceit. Still she did wish Carter hadn't made her say she would divorce Bentwell to marry him as soon as Miss Ella died.

She wrote Miss Ella dutifully, telling her that the cough which had forced her to leave "Dear Bent and Ellinor" was almost gone. She knew Miss Ella approved a mother who remembered her obligations.

At the end of three weeks Lida got reservations for the trip north. Carra and Hal were going on to Havana. They had spoken of it frequently and a bit pointedly, with eyes fixed above Lida's head.

Lida told Carter that it was tragic how friends disappointed one. She had really liked Carra until, living in the same house with her, she had found Carra disapproving of "nothing at all," suffering with each day and becoming more and more combative.

Carra had said, eyes narrowing, "Lida, if I were you I wouldn't play much more with Vance Carter. It's rather cruel, don't you think?"

And Lida's innocent, "But Carra—I can't think what you mean!" had done nothing but make the other woman look at her with a disconcerting steadiness, laugh unpleasantly and say bluntly, "Don't be a fool! You know damned well what I mean!"

The visit had, as this continued, been rather disappointing.

Lida loathed trains and the people one saw upon them. She arrived in New York in a smoldering mood to find that the motor for which she had wired was not waiting for her. Fuming within, she gave a taxicab chauffeur the Park Avenue address and planned the stinging reprimand she would voice to Bentwell and Ellinor. They should have seen that she was met!

She let herself into the apartment with her key taken from her bag by Lida's anxious, loudly voiced admiration. Later Carra had said to Hal, "She's hopeless—completely without pride and a schemer. I can't see how I was fooled for so long!"

Inside the apartment Lida paused a moment in the foyer. Then she heard voices beyond. Ellinor's voice and some man's. She couldn't place the man but she knew it was not Bobby Telfair who had long been devoted to Ellinor. Deliberately eavesdropping, Lida stepped to the door to hear what they were saying.

(To Be Continued)

Benjamin Franklin's portrait in the White House was originally carried away from Franklin's home by Major Andre, who gave it to General Grey. Grey took it to England, and Earl Grey, a descendant, sent it to President Theodore Roosevelt at the executive mansion.

The earliest mechanical time measure was a water clock, containing water which was allowed to escape through a small hole, marks on the side indicating the lapse of time.

The Panama canal makes San Francisco closer to Liverpool, England, by 5566 miles, a saving of two-fifths of the old journey.

The ultra-microscope at the U. S. bureau of standards can detect differences of one-billionth of an inch.

OUT OUR WAY

By J. R. Williams OUR BOARDING HOUSE

By Ahern



SALESMAN SAM

By Small



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES

By Martin



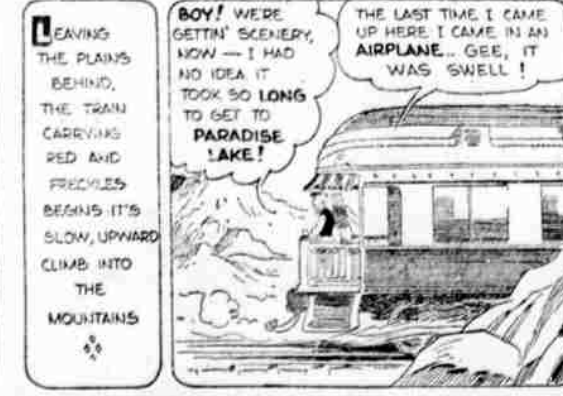
WASH TUBBS

By Crane



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS

By Blosser



THE NEWFANGLES—MOM'N POP

By Cowan

