

Bargain Bride

by KATHARINE HAVILAND-TAYLOR

BEGIN HERE TODAY

BARRETT COLVIN, back in New York after years abroad, falls in love with 20-year-old ELINOR STAFFORD. Barrett is 35, wealthy, and has made a name for himself as an archeologist.

LIDA STAFFORD, Elinor's beautiful mother, has kept the girl in the background, wanting attention for herself. Lida is carrying on a flirtation with VANCE CARTER and constantly scheming to keep in the good graces of rich MISS ELIA SEXTON, her husband's aunt, in order to inherit a share of the SEXTON fortune.

Years before Barrett shielded his half-sister, MARCIA, when a youthful romance ended disastrously. Marcia had a son whom Barrett adopted. She tells Barrett that if her husband leaves her, the affair he will never forgive her.

Lida goes to Miami. Elinor is glad, knowing that with her mother away she will have some chance to hold Barrett's interest. Then Elinor's mother unexpectedly returns. She enters the apartment, hears Elinor talking to a maid, and deliberately eavesdrops.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER XII

LIDA leaned forward, listening intently. She wanted to know what Elinor and the young man were saying. Her eyes took in a huge bouquet of red roses on a table in the hall. Beyond, in the drawing room, she saw butterfly orchids in a silver bowl.

Then she heard Elinor say, "But, Barry—"

It was Barrett Colvin. Lida realized. She did not want to have Barrett Colvin devoted to Elinor! She wanted him to admire her; to recite her good qualities to Miss Elia SEXTON who was devoted to Barry and obviously easily influenced by him.

A tragedy it would be, Lida decided swiftly, for Aunt Elia to leave the bulk of her fortune to Elinor. And Aunt Elia was quite likely to leave a large part of it to anyone Barrett Colvin admired. Elinor's tastes were too simple; Elinor would have been perfectly happy living on the smallest allowance while Lida simply had to have money! Elinor, of course, would give her mother what she needed but Lida did not want her daughter in the position where she could give, nor have her capable of spending what she pleased and where she pleased. Elinor would be altogether too generous with such people as the Thropes and Philip SEXTON.

"Any young girl is better off for control," Lida thought often. She could always make herself comfortable concerning any one and assure herself that whatever she wanted was the thing that was right.

She tiptoed a little closer to the drawing room doorway and stood close to a billowing curtain, pressed against the wall. Elinor was saying, "But I've never known anyone so fine as you are, Barry. It's ridiculous for you to keep harping on age as you do!"

He blurted out, "I want you to have the best!"

THERE was a silence. Then Lida heard his deep-drawn breath and knew he had kissed Elinor. "I didn't mean to do that before," he said and hesitated. He was going on, Lida was sure, to say "before I asked you to marry me."

Oh, but she could not have that! Lida moved swiftly toward the drawing room door. On the threshold she paused, knowing the picture she made.

"My dear, dear, dear child!" she exclaimed tremulously. She saw the color drain from Elinor's face and her eyes grew big and dark. Elinor had on a new dress and was wearing her hair in the way Lida had declared to be absurdly theatrical. Barrett Colvin did not like the interruption, she saw. He was flushed and looking sullen. But she would manage it so that he would thank her and later, with a little more managing, she could bring him to heel.

The envious malice asserted itself and brought a tinge of pink to Lida's lovely skin. It would be an absurd marriage for Elinor, she decided. Elinor would be far happier married to some poor man, putting about at housework as Bessie Thrope did, trying to stretch pennies and nickels, than attempting to manage the household of a millionaire.

"Be a little glad to see me, please, dear!" Lida begged wistfully of Elinor and very tenderly kissed her. She saw a question in Barrett Colvin's eyes which she knew (with satisfaction) had been put there by Elinor's turning a cool cheek for that kiss.

Lida laid her small hands on Elinor's shoulders. "I can't tell you how good it is to see you, my darling," she said, her voice full and throbbing. "I've missed you so much."

"It's going to be ridiculously easy," Lida thought. But she mustn't leave them alone until she had had a chance to speak to Barrett in private!

"Darling," Lida said, pulling off her gloves, "would you do something for mother?"

ELINOR stood like a stick. All her grace had been wiped away by resentment and growing fear. Yet surely, the girl thought, trying to down the ache that was beginning in her heart, he cared! He was too true, too loyal to be influenced now. If he could be changed by her mother he was not the man she had believed him to be. Nothing could be then as she had dreamed. Life would be—oh, it would be horrible!

Her heart cried out, "Please Barrett! Please understand!"

Lida went on, "I want you to telephone Aunt Elia to tell her I am back home safe, sweet. And

OUT OUR WAY

By J. R. Williams



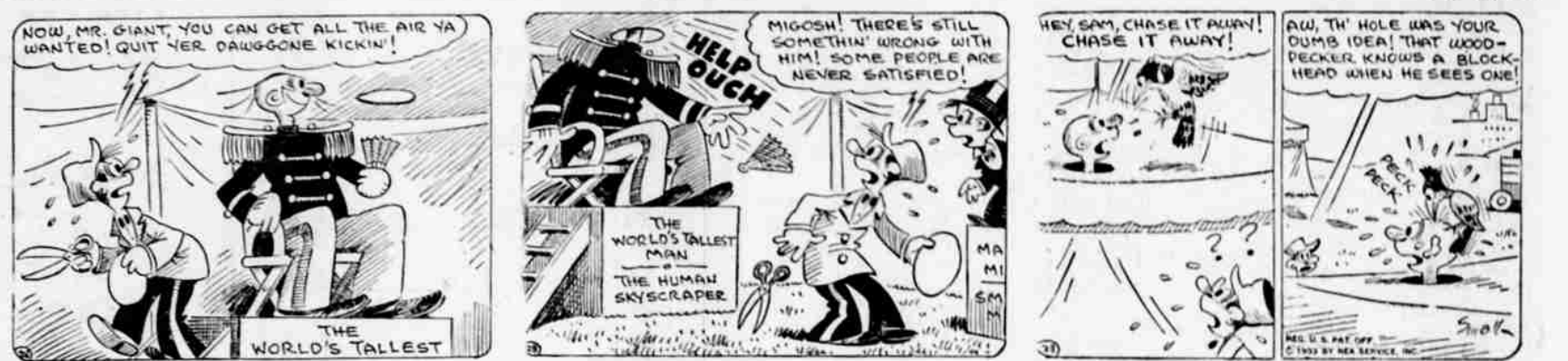
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