

Bargain Bride

by KATHARINE HAVILAND-TAYLOR

BEGIN HERE TODAY
ELINOR STAFFORD, 26, falls in love with 35-year-old BARRY (JOHN), who has returned to New York after years abroad. Barrett has made a name for himself as an archaeologist. He is about to ask Elinor to marry him when her father, who is a millionaire, LIDA STAFFORD, intervenes and succeeds in breaking up the romance.

When Elinor's aunt, wealthy MISS ELIA SEXTON, dies she leaves her entire fortune to Barrett. Three drunken VANCE CARTER, Elinor's father, Barrett, who does not want the fortune, tells Elinor that if she will marry him and live in his home as a guest for a year he will give the entire sum to her. Elinor agrees, knowing the money may save her father from bankruptcy. The marriage takes place next day. Barrett and Elinor have their first quarrel when he finds she intends to give all Miss Sexton's money away, keeping nothing for herself. Elinor insists she will not accept alimony from him at the end of the year their marriage is to last.

CHAPTER XXIX

A SMALL night light was burning beside Elinor's bed and she was sitting up, curling hair framing her oval face and touching her bare shoulders.

"Barrett," she said as he stood beside her. "I can't stand it! Her lips trembled on the words. He sank to the edge of her bed and took her hands in his.

"I'll do anything you want me to," he went on, "but I hope you won't want me to take any of Aunt Elia's money."

"I don't want you to, since you feel as you do about it, but I do want to provide for you—when the time comes. I don't know how I'd stand it if you wouldn't let me do that."

"I can take money from you more easily," she admitted.

"Well," he murmured. His throat had thickened a little with her confession. His eyes stung. "Suppose," he said, "we call this matter closed?"

"Let's!"

"I know I was harsh, child—"

"Oh, no! I was obstinate but—"

"Well, it's over now." He had to stifle the "dear" that was on the tip of his tongue.

She laid her hand on his and again his heart was beating thickly.

"We made rather a mountain out of a molehill," he said.

"I suppose we did but I couldn't seem to help it," she agreed with a deeply indrawn breath and a little smile.

"We were both—rather earnest!"

"Yes—"

He rose quickly. "Better be on my way," he said. "Peace to you, child." Stooping suddenly, he kissed her forehead.

"We must be friends," he said a bit thickly. "Today has taught us that."

He did not understand her eyes that were crying, "I love you!" but he knew he could not stifle his. "Good night, dear."

ALONE Elinor touched her forehead with her hand and then held the hand to her lips. She had been less than a week in this house and already she was back where she had been, willing to kneel to him if he would have her.

Barrett next morning smiled bitterly to himself. How could he have been taken in so completely as to believe the girl really meant what she had said? How could he when he knew her for exactly what she was?

Elinor awakened with a chill start to think, "Philip!" She had not put his name down—Philip Sexton who sneered over coins tossed to him in public yet took anything that was given him where no one could see his acceptance. She had—in the excitement—forgotten Philip! She would tell Barrett that she must have \$100,000 which she could not explain.

Barrett heard this and thought wearily, "No, you could hardly explain—after the role you assumed last night!" He was convinced that Elinor was not going to cheat herself in doing out the Sexton millions.

For Elinor the weeks that followed passed swiftly. She sat for hours each day with her father, Bentwell Stafford seemed to be recovering but his strength came slowly. Elinor went to see Marcia and the tiny son who had at last arrived. She shared Elinor's and Jim's tremendous excitement over their new house on Long Island.

With Bessie puffing happily on long shopping jaunts, Elinor considered chintzes, rugs, schools for the boys and the tones of radios.

Elinor had had a hard battle with her aunt and auntie before persuading them to say they would take a share of the fortune. Before it was settled she admitted a truth she had never voiced even to her aunt who was so close to her.

"Aunt Bessie," she said on a day in mid-January when she was almost worn out by her futile argument with proud obstinacy. "I have never said this before. I wouldn't say it now but I must. I know, Aunt Bessie, that you and Uncle Jim were remembered substantially in Aunt Elia's will a year ago. My mother found out about it and she so cleverly planted suggestions about your inability to handle money that she persuaded Aunt Elia to change her plans. The sum I want you and Uncle Jim and the boys to have is yours. It's exactly what was left you until my mother robbed you of it. Are you going to burden me all my life with the consciousness of having stolen your money?" Barrett and I both know this money is yours and that more might have been yours if you had been willing to do what my mother did. There has been plenty of gossip

about mother that you could have told Aunt Elia—"

"I never did tell Aunt Elia anything about your mother," Bessie admitted. "Once I thought of it—I never did, though—and I was so glad even right after Aunt Elia's death that I didn't."

Jim Thrope heard all this and considered it. Barrett put in his voice and at last they were persuaded. After that came the ecstatic hunt for a house with "nice grounds and space around it."

"There's not a dark room in it!" Bessie would pant, shopping with Elinor. And Elinor would press her aunt's arm closer to her side, saying, "Barrett thinks it is a marvelous bargain!"

Bessie told Jim Senior that all Elinor's opinions were second-hand and "I never saw a child so much in love," she said. "It's some time since she's a little too much in love. It puts every egg in one basket, you know," she pointed out.

"Oh, Barrett's all right!" Jim assured her. "If you ask me, he's crazier about her than she is about him. Notice the way he kissed her when he came here for her the other evening?"

"Yes, I did—" Bessie admitted. She had not been as convinced by that scene as Jim had. There had been tension and a balked hanger back of Barrett's swift kiss. Sometimes the astute Bessie suspected that affairs weren't quite what they seemed for Barrett and Elinor.

YET the girl was happy; extremely and patiently happy. She talked of their games of chess, of plays she saw with Barrett, of playing the piano for him. She hurried home toward the close of each afternoon in order to be in for tea. There was a new brightness in her eyes, a new sweetness in her face. She was gentler than ever and she had always been gentle.

"But," Bessie thought, "something about it is not quite right."

Elinor had had no difficulty in settling a fortune upon her parents. Her father was too weary, too frail to consider the right and wrong of anything. Her mother held out eager hands as her eyes brightened.

"It is ours," Lida said. "I'm glad Barrett saw it that way!"

Lida made innumerable new purchases—matching snake-skin purse and shoes, a vibrating machine which she used once, frocks that had seemed attractive and that she discarded after one wearing, Italian pottery, colored glass. She was feverish in her search for diversion—and no diversion helped her to forget that Vance Carter had been locked up as insane in order to escape a less comfortable place of imprisonment.

Vance wrote Lida now and again, his letters smuggled out of the asylum to a post box by a bribed guard. The letters were bitter arraignment of her, of his folly in having believed in her. He told her in the bluntest phrases what she was. Lida tried to burn the letters when they came, without reading them, but that gesture takes strength and Lida's only manner of strength lay in telling lies.

After "the accident" she had had to deny even the slightest interest in Vance Carter. She had admitted publicly that he had "annoyed" her for some time. She implied that her nature was a home-keeping one. Seeing her mother's name in newspaper headlines made Elinor shrink. It was all so sordid. She thought of Vance Carter with hot pity. She knew what her mother had done to add weakness to weakness.

"Don't think of it," Barrett urged often. He was learning by her changing expressions to know the emotions they mirrored. He was learning too, that he could not bear to have her anything but happy.

He supposed as the weeks passed that he was being a fool again but he could not help it. He tried to steel himself against her, to ignore her natural appeal and he failed.

(To Be Continued)

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OUT OUR WAY



OUR BOARDING HOUSE



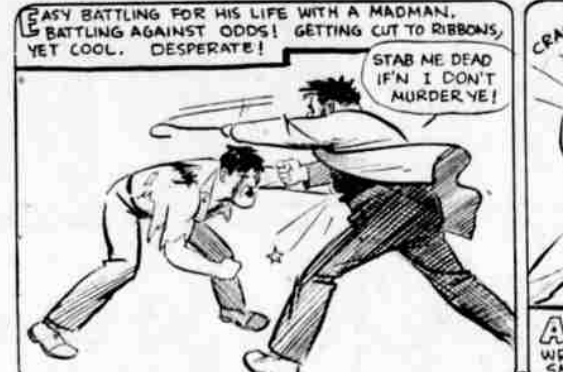
SALESMAN SAM



ROOTS AND HER BUDDIES



VASH TUBBS



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



THE NEWFANGLES—MOM'N POP



By Ahern

By Small

By Martin

By Crane

By Blosser

By Cowan