

Bargain Bride

by KATHARINE HAVILAND-TAYLOR

BEGIN HERE TODAY

ELINOR STAFFORD, 26, falls in love with 35-year-old BARRETT COLVIN who has returned to New York after years abroad. Barrett has made a name for himself as an archeologist. He is about to ask Elinor to marry him when her jealous, scheming mother, LIDA STAFFORD, interferes and succeeds in breaking up the romance.

When Elinor's aunt, wealthy MISS HILLA SEXTON, dies she leaves her entire fortune to Barrett. Then drunken VANCE CARPENTER shoots BENTWELL STAFFORD, Elinor's father. Barrett, who does not want the Sexton 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 of divide among the relatives. Elinor agrees, knowing the money may save her father's life.

The marriage takes place next day. Barrett still loves Elinor, but, believing what Lida has told him, he will not admit this love.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER XXX

ONE warm day in the middle of March Barrett decided he would ask Elinor whether he had any chance at all to make their marriage something more than an unromantic business arrangement, to make it not merely for the remainder of the year but for always. His faith in her had been growing. Even so his critical eyes her conduct had been exemplary since the day he had brought her to his home.

She was docile, sweet, gay. "And Lord, but you're dear to me!" he thought frequently as he looked at her across the chess table or listened to her music.

He had fallen into the habit of indulging those small gestures which indicate a comradeship affection—a hand on her arm, a pat on her shoulder, a shoulder pressed to hers as they watched the unfolding of some play. Even, once and again, a hand beneath her rounded chin, raising it to ask anxiously, "Now what's wrong?"

Slowly the conviction had been growing in Barrett's mind that she was fond of him, that she really cared. She had followed him into the hall that morning as he was about to leave the house. "I'm going to Aunt Bessie's after lunch," she said, "but I'll be back in time for tea. That is—I will if you'll be here—"

He was engaged on a research job, a rather demanding piece of work that had kept him away from the house more than he liked.

"Wouldn't miss it for the world," he assured her.

"Then I'll be here," she said, smiling. Almost at once she had looked away and before he could reply Higgins appeared to say that Mrs. Radnor wanted to speak to Mrs. Colvin.

"Just a moment, Higgins," Elinor answered. Barrett, stooping, kissed her lips.

"For Higgins' benefit," he explained as the latter disappeared. Then for a moment Barrett eyed her steadily. "No," he said. "I lied. I kissed you because I wanted to—"

SHE said nothing but her smile was a little tremulous, her eyes misty. He kissed her hands suddenly as he had never kissed her lips, then turned hurriedly toward the door.

She stood where he had left her, hands above her heart, eyes closed. For weeks she had known something of his growing feeling for her. She had heard it in his voice which softened as he spoke to her. She had seen it in the hungry eyes that followed her. It had been charmed, too, in his gaze for her entertainment, in the flowers and books and music that had come to her from him. Almost daily there had been some offering.

"Oh—make it come true!" she prayed. "I can't live without him!"

"Mrs. Radnor is waiting," Higgins reminded humbly.

"Oh, yes!" she laughed unsteadily. She had forgotten. "Yes, Marcia!" she said breathlessly a moment later. Barrett had kissed her because he wanted to. Kissed her because he wanted to. "I'm sorry, Marcia, I didn't catch that. Oh, yes—for the baby's bath. I'll come right down. No, nothing's wrong. The connection is a little bad—"

The result of Barrett's working day could have given, to even a less ambitious workman, no reason for pride. He dined over this and that, looked at a stenitic plaque to lay it down without seeing the hieroglyphics which he was supposed to consider; picked up a seal of freedom to lay that down, too. He had run his hands through his hair and then pretended to examine a cuneiform inscription.

AT two o'clock Barrett rose. "I'm going to luncheon, Blinker," he said, "and I'm not coming back today. Have Miss Pringle's American Indian donation ready for me. I'll look it over in the morning."

"I'm afraid," said Blinker humbly, "that you'll find it a fake."

"I'm afraid so too," said Barrett. Rather an awkward affair. He didn't like to hurt an old lady who wanted to do something "worth while" for a university museum. Perhaps it would hurt the university too. She might be the sort who would do nothing at all for the school if they told her

that her collection was worthless. And yet it was impossible to tamper with the truth, Barrett knew.

Once out of the building, he moved swiftly. He was going home to the girl whose face now haunted him everywhere. Home to ask whether he had a chance to be her husband for all time. Home to say, "I want to woo you and win you—if I can! You don't know how I'll try; how much you mean to me. You never will know, I suppose, but I'll try to prove it with the years—"

How could he endure it if she should say definitely that he had no chance and never could have a chance? His heart chilled.

But a vision of her face that morning, lifted to him, returned to cheer him. His heart had been beating unevenly all day with the memory of that look and what it seemed to mean.

He reached home at three to learn that Elinor had not yet returned. If she were in Brooklyn with Bessie he would call for her, he decided, warming at the promise of the extra time with her and the thought of having her beside him. He telephoned Bessie Thorpe and learned that Elinor had left an hour before. "She was only here a little while," Bessie said. "She had luncheon here. Elinor says Little Dick Radnor is so sweet. Barry! She saw him have his bath this morning—"

He answered vaguely, adding, "Do you know where Elinor went?" Bessie did not know. "I had the impression," she said, "that she was going straight home."

His emotion was strangely exhausted. He said "thank you" and then "goodby."

Elinor might have stopped to shop or to see some friend he reasoned; yet suspicions that had been sleeping were suddenly aroused.

HE settled moodily in the drawing room by a window to smoke continually and to frown. A French clock that stood on the mantel struck four. From the hall came the quarter hour—a full day later it seemed! She was usually in by four.

He rose and stood by the window. The lengthening chime that told half past four came from the hall.

He crashed the last of his many cigarettes and dropped it on a silver tray. Higgins appeared to ask whether Mrs. Colvin would be home for tea.

Barrett began a muttered affirmative response but the words broke in the middle of it. A motor car had paused outside—a low, open sport car. Bobby Telfair stepped from it and opened the door. Elinor, smiling, descended.

Barrett moved back from the window. So this was the explanation of her delay! This was the reason Bessie had thought Elinor was going straight home!

She came in quickly, her step eager. She was late and she had particularly looked forward to the quiet tea hour with Barrett who had kissed her that morning because he wanted to!

She had gone from Bessie's to see Philip, who was ill. She wanted to tell Barrett about Philip. She had not as yet. Elinor dreaded his censuring Philip for taking as much from her as he had and she had not been able to nerve herself to combat with Barrett nor to threaten through any confidence, the growing peace and happiness of their hours together. The fact that she had not told Barrett about Philip weighed her essentially truthful mind.

"Barry!" she called eagerly from the doorway. He turned stiffly.

"I'm so sorry to be late," she said, moving toward him. Would he kiss her again? "I was delayed. I wouldn't be here now if Bobby Telfair hadn't met me and picked me up—"

The words stopped. All too evidently Elinor could see in the man's stony eyes that he did not believe her.

(To Be Continued)

Flapper Fanny Says



People who balance their diet seldom fall off in weight.

OUT OUR WAY



SALESMAN SAM



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



WASH TUBBS



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



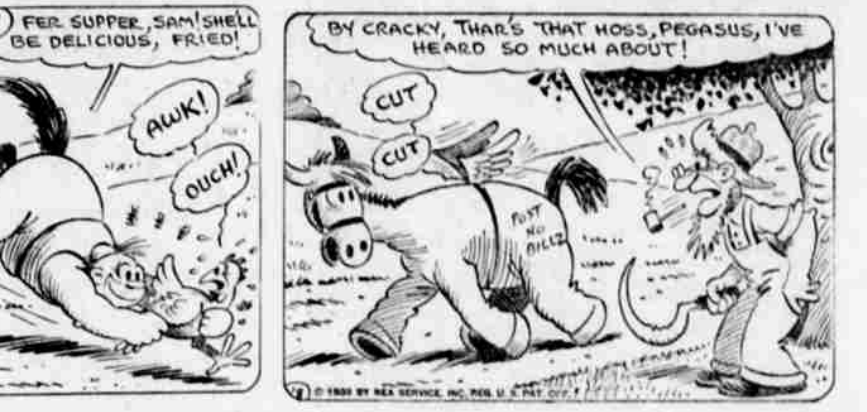
THE NEWFANGLES—MOM'N POP



OUR BOARDING HOUSE



By Small



By Martin



By Crane



By Blosser



By Cowan

