

Bargain Bride

by KATHARINE HAVILAND-TAYLOR

BEGIN HERE TODAY

ELINOR STAFFORD falls in love with BARRETT COLVIN who is 20 and he is 35. LIDA STAFFORD, Elinor's jealous, scheming mother, breaks up the romance by convincing Barrett that Elinor is a heartless flirt. When Elinor's aunt, wealthy MISS ELLA NIXON, dies she leaves her fortune to Barrett. Then drunken VANCE CARTER shoots BENTWELL STAFFORD, Elinor's father. Barrett tells Elinor that if she will marry him and live as a guest in his house for a year he will give her the entire Sexton fortune to divide among her relatives, the rightful inheritors. Knowing the money may save her father's life, Elinor agrees.

The marriage takes place. Barrett, still believing the lies Lida has told him, finds himself more in love with Elinor than ever. The doctor orders a change of climate for her father and Elinor goes to Alaska with him.

Years before Barrett selected his half-sister, MARCIA HADNOR, when a youthful romance ended disastrously. Marcia had a son whom Barrett despised. He has promised Marcia never to reveal the boy's story. Lida Stafford learns about the boy's existence and concludes he is Barrett's son.

Barrett makes an unannounced trip to Alaska. He finds MISS TELLER there and suspects Elinor of carrying on a flirtation with Bob. In an angry scene he tells her that he knows all about her schemes. Later he apologizes.

That night Barrett Stafford dies.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY CHAPTER XXV

BARRETT arose with a jerk and took the stairs two at a time. The nurse was waiting for him in the upper hall. She whispered, "Perhaps you can help Mrs. Colvin. We're worried about her. They were so devoted."

He opened Elinor's door without waiting to hear more, stepped into the room and closed the door after himself. A small night light was burning by the bed. Elinor lay there dry-eyed and too quiet. He crossed the room swiftly to lean above her.

"Child!" he whispered.

"I haven't anyone now," she said clearly.

"You have me as long as you want me. So long as there is anything I can do for you," he answered her.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and took one of her small hands between his. It was cold, twitching. He held a hand on her bare shoulder and noticed that it was as cold as her hand. She looked questioningly at him.

"You're cold, Elinor."

"Am I?"

He rubbed her hands, suddenly raised her and held her in his arms. For a moment she was rigid. Then she relaxed and he heard the first deep sob that shook her.

"Darling!" he whispered. "Darling!"

A half hour later Miss Hemmingway entered the room after Barrett's. "Come!" answered her knock. He was sitting in a deep chair before the fire he had started. Elinor, wrapped in blankets, was in his arms. She had been crying. Miss Hemmingway saw with relief. That reaction was normal and reassuring. The girl had seemed too unnaturally content.

"I brought another sleeping powder for Mrs. Colvin."

"Good!" said Barrett. Elinor sat up, drank it and then lay back. Miss Hemmingway saw the man's arms tighten as she closed the door.

"Am I tiring you?" Elinor asked.

"Dearest, you could not tire me this way."

HE stroked her hair with a hand that had grown unsteady, bent his head until his cheek touched her cheek that was hot from tears.

"Elinor—"

"Yes"

"I want to ask you to give me another trial. Let me show you that I'm not so changeable as you think. I won't bother you in any way, I promise. Do you believe me?"

"Yes—"

"What I want most from life now is to take care of you. Nothing else matters to me—"

Her hand moved and for a second he felt that it pressed his hand faintly. He touched her soft hair with his lips, stared blindly at the leaping fire.

"I want a chance to make you care for me without feeling ashamed."

"I'm sorry I said that, Barrett. I know it's my fault that you can't care steadily—"

"But you'll find I can!" he promised. Why, he asked himself, had he expected the impossible from her? There were no women who did not, in some way, let him down. Marcia had and so had her fiery, sullen mother. Elinor's mother had been brutally frank in her revelations of the failings of her sex. Miss Ella had felt that no form of spying was beneath her. They were obviously all alike, yet sometimes a man found one woman who compelled his love and thus a compromise. He had found Elinor. Doubtless Bob Telford had held her as he did now but he told himself he must not think of that.

He moved gently so that he could look down at her face, pressed against his shoulder. She was so white, so pitifully white. "If I could kiss you," he thought, "and know you kissed no one else!"

SOME people need lots of room to air their views.

OUT OUR WAY



OUR BOARDING HOUSE



SALESMAN SAM



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



WASH TUBBS



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



THE NEWFANGLES-MOM'N POP

