

Bargain Bride

by KATHARINE HAVILAND-TAYLOR

BEGIN HERE TODAY

ELINOR STAFFORD falls in love with BARRETT COLVIN. She is so sure of him that she schemes to break up the romance by convincing Barrett that Elinor is a heartless girl. When Elinor's aunt, wealthy MISS ELIZABETH STAFFORD, dies she leaves her fortune to Barrett. Then Barrett's father, CARVER STAFFORD, who is a doctor, tells Elinor that if she will marry him and live on his farm for a year he will give her the entire fortune to divide as she sees fit. Elinor's father, Barrett tells her that if she will marry him and live on his farm for a year he will give her the entire fortune to divide as she sees fit. Elinor's father, Barrett tells her that if she will marry him and live on his farm for a year he will give her the entire fortune to divide as she sees fit.

CHAPTER XL

ON nights when Marcia could not sleep she was haunted by Arthur Palmer's eyes and what he had said. He didn't know what he was talking about, she assured herself. He couldn't understand how she felt about Dick, her husband. If Dick, who believed her to be so innocent, should learn the truth about her marriage to Lon Moore it would be a fatal blow. It would kill Dick! He would never, never forgive the fact that she had lied to him.

It was on one of the hottest afternoons in June that Marcia called at her brother's home. Higgins opened the door for her. He said, "Mr. and Mrs. Colvin are expecting you, Miss Marcia."

"Thank you, Higgins," she answered, stepping into the hall. It was cool after the blistering heat of the street.

She gave the butler a box of flowers she had brought from her garden and slipped from her silk coat which he took. She heard music as she moved toward the drawing room. Elinor and Barrett were there. For a moment Marcia studied them from the doorway.

Barrett stood with his arms on the piano, staring down at the girl. Marcia had never seen him before with that look of adoring tenderness. Elinor's face was raised to his and she was smiling. They were obviously devoted to each other.

"Well!" said Marcia loudly, abruptly.

The two at the piano started. Barrett turned and called out warmly, "Hello!" He was too happy, she saw, to hold resentment. Elinor rose.

"I'm so glad to see you, Marcia!" she exclaimed.

"Darling child!" Marcia murmured, kissing Elinor. "My heavens, but you look lovely! Lovely!"

"I happen to think so too," Barrett said slowly. With a quick shy glance at him, Elinor flushed. Marcia felt herself hardening as she stared at Barrett. She had thought him to be devoted to her but she realized now he had given her only the surface of his love, crumbs from his table. It was not a pleasant thought for one of Marcia's temperaments.

She settled herself in a chair. "Tell me, was Cubs amusing?" she asked.

"Rather," said Barrett, again looking at Elinor. "I've always been attracted by the place."

"Did you like it too, dear?" Marcia went on, turning to Elinor.

"Oh, I adored it!" the girl answered.

"You two talk just the way Dick and I did about Dick's place in Canada where we spent our honeymoon. But you aren't honeymooners and haven't that excuse," Marcia murmured. To herself she thought, "What in the world can make Elinor flush so?"

"We were really delighted with the trip," Barrett stated hurriedly. Higgins came in then with the flowers Marcia had brought. Elinor and Barrett both seemed eager to speak of the flowers, admiring them and praising them rather extravagantly. Barrett, drawing his chair closer to Elinor's, reached for an end of the string sash she wore about her frock and ran it through his fingers.

He had to be near Elinor, Marcia saw. The thought aroused a flame of jealousy in her heart that was disconcerting.

Elinor asked about the baby and immediately Marcia was off. She related with elaborate detail just how the baby smiled, the way he looked while sleeping. She missed not a bead of the rosy every proud mother tells but she saw in her listeners a tendency to smile or hint at boredom as so many listeners do. Instead she felt she had their whole-hearted attention.

"You've been sweet about listening to all this," Marcia admitted when at last she had finished. "But it's so wonderful—navigating a baby for one's own! I can't help babbling. I hope some day you'll understand."

"I hope so," said Elinor and blushed.

AGAIN Barrett was looking at Elinor with that humble, adoring look. He laid his hand upon Elinor's. He had to make a trip down town and Marcia volunteered to give him a lift. Before her, and much to her amusement, he said his goodbyes to Elinor, kissing her and adding, "Don't forget me!" He tried to make it seem a joke but quite obviously it was more than that.

"It looks as if life were happy for you, Barry," Marcia commented after they were on their way.

Later that night when they were upstairs she called through the open door between their rooms. "Oh, Barry—!"

"Yes, dear?" he answered. He knew at once that it was coming. The question he would rather not have her ask to which he must respond with a lie. "May I come in, Barry?"

"Of course, dear."

He had taken off his coat and was fumbling with the studs in the front of his shirt as she entered. Elinor was swathed in a negligee of yellow chiffon. It was the color most becoming to her, setting high lights of gold dancing in her hair.

She sat down on a low stool and watched him, frowning at himself in the mirror.

"These things are obstinate," he murmured. Then, triumphantly, "There we are!"

He was hoping that he could divert her. He did not want her to ask, "What makes mother look at you the way she does, Barry?" If she asked that or anything like that he would have to find some way of evading.

Her smile became a trifle stiff and he saw that her eyes were wistful, frightened. Always before when she had come into his room he had dropped everything to welcome her.

Elinor noted his preoccupation. She told herself that she should have realized his devotion, all those little attentions, could not last.

"Barry—," she began again.

"Yes, darling?"

"Barry, what makes mother—I don't know just how to express it—but why does she look at you so stily sometimes? The way she did this afternoon? It's almost as though there was something you and she know that was a secret."

"Lord, dear, you know your mother better than I do! How would I know why she does anything?"

"I don't know why I asked," Elinor said slowly, "but I thought you did know, Barry. Somehow I've felt that you did. I don't know how to express it but I thought I could see aversion—or shrinking—in your face. These last few weeks I've thought I could tell what you were thinking just by looking at you. You have such an honest face, Barrett."

He hoped he did not—at the moment. But he was true. And Elinor had seen that he was hiding something from her. She had seen that he was ashamed of the deception, too. He couldn't tell her that he and Lida had no secrets because that wouldn't be true. And he couldn't tell her the truth because of his promise to Marcia.

There was nothing for Barrett Colvin to do but curse the luck that had led him into such a trap.

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Flapper Fanny Says



Many a social climber is soon discouraged by the overhead.

OUT OUR WAY



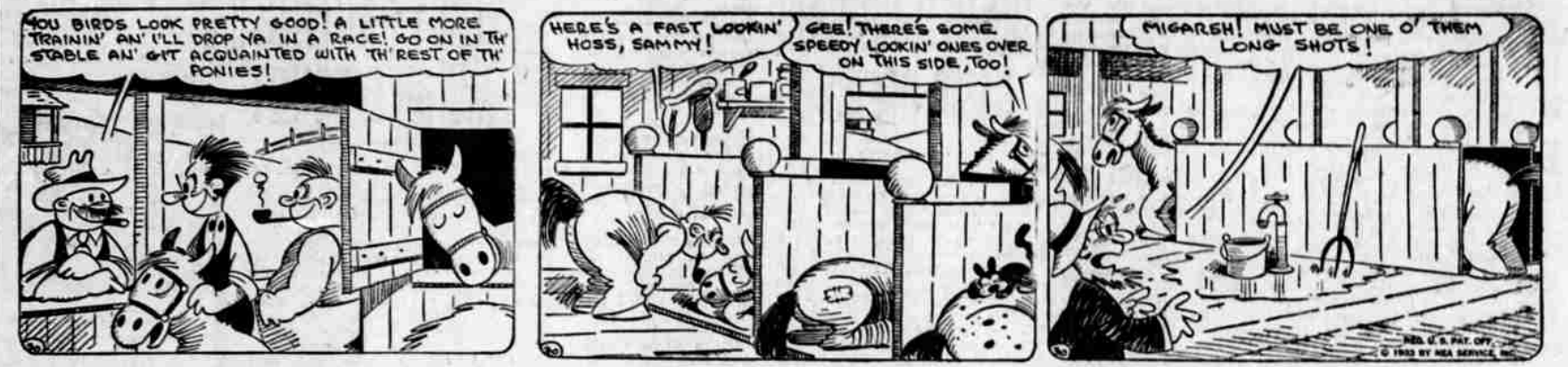
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