

The Free Press' Short Story

THE ATTIC BRIDE

MARGARET K. SANGSTER

ALMA KENT had strained her financial resources to fill her hope chest. To purchase the simple garments in which she would be married was even more of a strain. Her salary as stenographer at the mill was very tiny, and out of that salary she had to pay most of the running expenses of her mother's cottage. As Alma surveyed the aforementioned hope chest, nevertheless, she was delighted with it for her household linens were quite adequate, she had hemmed the napkins by hand and monogrammed them, and had expensed the heavy lace that edged the bureau scarfs and pillow slips.

"I don't think any girl ever had prettier things," she told her mother. "I wish it were in my power, honey, to give you more of prettiness. I'd like to give you dozens and dozens of towels and sheets and table cloths. I'd like to give you a big wedding, and a satin dress with a train, and a veil of point lace." Alma stifled a sigh. She did not want her dear, self-sacrificing mother to guess that she herself would have enjoyed a big wedding and a satin bridal dress.

"It's much more sensible, Mummy," she said, "for me to be married in a travelling suit. If I do say it who should not, it's the smartest travelling suit in this town. Too! There's nothing nicer than blue serge, with a frilly blouse and a smart turban. Then, of course, Terry will give me a beautiful carriage to wear with it."

"I'm so glad," Alma's mother was smiling, "that you're marrying a young man with prospects, darling. Yes, Terry will give you a fine carriage, bouquet, probably lilacs of the valley and orchids. Your engagement ring is lovely, too, and I'm sure you'll have a sweet wedding ring. Oh, things will be easier, once you are married, Alma. You won't have to scrimp and save as you do now. After all, Terry has a rich father, his father will no doubt do something for him."

"I don't think Terry wants his father to do something for him. It will be so easy for us to get along on his salary, we don't need help. Just the same—she was closing down the lid of her hope chest, "I'm glad his father isn't coming to the wedding. His father lives in such a big house, and has so many servants and is used to such luxury that I'd be very self-conscious about having him for a guest at such a simple wedding."

Mrs. Kent drew her daughter close. "I agree with you," she said. "There's nothing snobbish about Terry and probably his father is just like him, but all the same, I'm glad that he can't get to the wedding. It's a strain to prepare an entertainment for an unknown millionaire. Of course," she added, "millionaire or no, his son couldn't find a sweeter girl if he travelled the length and breadth of the country."

Alma kissed her mother, and said, "You're prejudiced, that's what's wrong with you!"

The doorbell ringing, caused an interruption. Alma darted from her mother's side; she fairly flew to answer the clanging summons. It was her fiancé, of course—Terry Hollister, lately imported from a distant city to be superintendent of the mill in which Alma had always worked. Alma, peering back over the progress of her romance, felt that she was a Cinderella, for she had liked Terry's looks on the first day when he came to the mill. To her he had embodied the characteristics of a prince charming; he was rich, successful, handsome. She had not dreamed that he would notice her in her corner among the filing cabinets, but he did notice her immediately he came into the stenographer's room. Before a week he had secured an introduction to her. In less than two weeks he was calling at the cottage and praising her mother's waffles.

her dress and her mother was adjusting the taffeta folds.

Oh, the dress was wrinkled and mussed and showed signs of having been laid away for many a long year; but it was still lovely and a hot iron would do wonders. What if it were a trifle wide through the shoulders, a clever tuck of two would simplify matters! What if it were a bit snug around the waist, a seam could be ripped in a crucial point. Mrs. Kent, surveying her daughter, said:

"You look adorable, honey. We'll get that frock the first thing in the morning. And when Mr. Hollister sees you, he'll think his son's bride is the loveliest bride in the world!"

The Kent cottage was busy and bustle all through the morning hours. Much stitching and pressing was to be done, as well as the frosting of cakes and the mixing of salad dressing. The guests were to be some of Terry's friends, a few of Alma's intimates and a baker's dozen of her mother's old friends.

The plain cottage was transformed by mid-afternoon, the time set for the wedding, and when Alma herself stood in front of the mirror and looked at a glimmering reflection, she felt, without any sense of conceit, that she fitted against the cottage's charming background. Her mother, watching misty-eyed, gave a wee sob and turned away.

"You look precious, my darling," she said, before she hurried down to greet the arriving guests.

Terry was the first to come, of course. He and the distinguished gray-haired man, who was his father. Terry asked playfully, "Where's Alma?"

Mrs. Kent warned him off with a slim, upraised hand. "It's bad luck," she told him, "to see your bride before the ceremony."

"From what Terry tells me, it's good luck to see this bride any time, Mrs. Kent."

Alma's mother, raising her eyes to his face, thought that he looked more like a benevolent benefactor than a critical millionaire.

One of Alma's friends played the wedding march on the parlor organ. The minister took his place before the improvised altar.

When Alma came softly into the room she was beautiful. The dress she wore had justified her faith in it; it was old-fashioned enough to be smart, and yet it was quaint also. Something in the very age of the taffeta made it mellow and extraordinarily lovely. Terry started forward as he saw Alma standing in the doorway, a rustle ran through the gathering of mutual friends, and the tears stood upon Mrs. Kent's cheeks.

"Why," he said, "my dear child," and before the marriage ceremony could begin, while the wedding march was still playing softly, he stepped forward to kiss his prospective daughter upon one of her round, flushed cheeks. "My dear child," he said again huskily, and then the sweet, solemn ceremony started.

All was excitement and confusion after the minister had pronounced Terry and Alma man and wife. Kissing and hand-shaking and the throwing of her bouquet followed. Terry's corsage had been kept for the blue travelling suit. A hastily improvised bouquet of white lilacs of the valley had been the one that the bride carried with her quaint frock.

The chicken salad had been eaten and the beaten biscuit, and the delicious cool fruit drink that Mrs. Kent had prepared. The wedding cake had been cut amid cheers and impromptu speeches. Not until Alma had run upstairs to change into her travelling suit had Mr. Hollister and Mrs. Kent found a moment in which they could converse. The young people, had formed groups, but the father and the mother were in a small oasis in a corner.

"I'm going to be very frank with you, Mrs. Kent," Mr. Hollister began. "I had my doubts about the sort of girl my son would choose, considering that he chose so hastily. I'm one—" he smiled, "who believes in due consideration; although I must confess that my own marriage was the result of love at first sight, and my own wedding came pretty quickly. However," he sighed, "I'm getting away from the point. I meant all the time to come to Terry's wedding, but I didn't tell him until the last minute so that I could take you—I'm ashamed to admit this—and your daughter unawares. Terry had told me he was marrying, you'll pardon me, a poor girl. I wanted to see whether you would make any attempt at pretense and sham because I was coming. If you had, I would have known. I can see pretense a mile off! Well, I was wrong. Everything was as sweet and simple as if you and Terry and your daughter had been here alone. I'm telling you this because

"I'm ashamed of myself and I want to apologize. Will you accept my apology?" "Indeed, I do!" Mrs. Kent laid her hand in Mr. Hollister's big one. "And now I'll make my confession. We are poor—and we did, in a way, feel that we were being tested. Alma hadn't even a wedding dress until last night, Mr. Hollister. When we heard that you were coming we rummaged through the attic and produced the one she was wearing. I wore it myself—twenty-one years ago!" "I like you—and I love your daughter. What can I do for her—and for you—to show how I feel? I thought about buying her a home, or giving Alma a bank account of her own, or bonds."

"Don't do that," Mrs. Kent spoke swiftly. "Let them work out their own salvation. I know how Terry and my daughter feel about it. They feel that Terry's making enough money for a young chap—and Alma mustn't be spoiled."

"I don't think that your daughter could be spoiled, but I'll wait. Some day, when there are children—"

A burst of laughter interrupted the conversation, and Alma, pretty as a fashion plate in her blue serge and orchids, came running down the stairs.

"This is the first time in years," said the millionaire, "that I haven't felt lonely."

"THEY SHALL NOT PASS" Supply Minister Tells France of Britain's Resources

"We are fighting at your side, and whatever violence the enemy may let loose we shall be true to your motto, and with you we repeat it: 'On ne passe pas!'" Speaking in French, one of the several languages in which he is fluent, Mr. Leslie Burgin, Supply Minister, concluded with these words a recent broadcast on Britain's strength to the French people.

He told them that it was not easy to measure the resources of Great Britain. Where in the world, he asked, would they find anything to compare with the greatness, the wealth, the diversity, the solidity of her resources?

"In the sphere of armaments British industry is transformed, working day and night at full blast to be equal to the gigantic demands which a war with Germany imposes," he said. "We have been promised a totalitarian war and have accepted the challenge. We shall bring to the struggle all the force and energy of our financial reserves. We have received with enthusiasm the news that France and Britain are pooling their resources."

"As for the Army, the British Expeditionary Force is only an advance guard, and increases daily. You will see column after column, and Germans will perhaps see more than they like. Let our enemies not only count our numbers. Let them reflect on the quality of the guns and mechanized vehicles. Let them realize the determination of the men."

"SCHOOL DISMISSED" The lesson was on the position and use of wind.

"As I was coming to school to-day," said the very pretty teacher "the bus door opened, and something came softly in kissed me on the cheek. Can you tell me what it was?"

"The conductor!" came the prompt and unanimous reply.

"FARM SKINS FOR GLOVES" In the manufacture of 563,802 dozen pairs of leather gloves, the leather glove and mitten industry of Canada in 1938, for which the latest details have just been published, used 5,975,637 square feet of cowhide, 3,633,998 of sheepskin, 1,122,220 of horsehide, 417,011 of minkskin, 679,883 of goat skin, 261,751 of pigskin, 85,410 of deer skin, 72,014 of lamb skin, and 56,463 of other kinds of skins. In addition \$1,570 worth of splits (various kinds of leather) and \$298,550 of other supplies were included in the manufacture. The total cost of materials used amounted to \$2,061,460.



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