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NEW YORK CITY

A BARGAIN THRILL

By ALDEN CHAPMAN

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To see life had been, the anticipation and hope of Ora Merjon ever since she moved into early girlhood. She had never been further from Postville than a neighboring town, but had lived on the promise of old Aunt Clarinda that some day she should come to Gold Harbor and spend a month.

Aunt Clarinda had been a resident of Gold Harbor before its salubrious and picturesque environment had become popular. Her modest little home was quite outside of the magic residential and hotel quarter.

Ora had dreamed deliciously and saved frugally. It was on her seventeenth birthday that Aunt Clarinda had written to Mrs. Merton: "Let the child come. I have made her a bathing suit and she can put in the whole month if you can spare her that long."

There was a full fortnight for Ora to make her preparations. She had thirty-two dollars and a ready-made dress waist and wrap. One day she was seated on the porch sewing on a home-made wrapper, when a queer, keen-eyed little man came up to the garden path carrying a peddler's pack. He placed this on a step and announced: "Some rare bargains, would like to show the young lady."

"It's not trinkets or cheap stuff, lady," he explained. "It's something choice and cheap—oh, so cheap! I have a brother in trouble. He cannot pay his bills and if I do not get cash quickly he will be sold out. I will show you what I have to sacrifice."

Ora's eyes glowed as the man slipped a strap and spread out the gorgeous, tempting contents of the pack. It was an extraordinary display. It was no notion counter layout, but two perfect ladies' suits, hats, gloves and scarfs.

"I'm going to tell you the truth, lady," spoke the peddler. "These goods are not new, although they were never worn. Here is the truth about them. They belonged to a leading actress. Her company got on the rocks and the law seized her belongings. I bought them cheap. I'm going to give you a bargain. Take your pick of one layout for twenty-five dollars."

Ora was so excited at this offer that she could hardly speak. Trembling, she looked over the articles in the pack, selected a complete outfit, paid the man his price and every time after that when she thought of the wonderful investment she had made she experienced a thrill of pride and pleasure.

Ora got to her aunt's, a happy, hopeful girl. Two mornings later she arrayed herself in her best. The dress, of a peculiar purplish tint, the neat, but expensive looking hat, the light, fleecy shoulder scarf, her mirror told her, presented an elegance and tastiness which became her grandly. "She was conscious that she was admired as she strolled down the beach. She sat down upon an upturned boat and reveled in a reverie of perfect contentment and peace.

"Why, Mabel! got here all right, did you?" and a shadow made Ora start. Then the speaker leaned over, kissed her squarely upon the lips and then drew back, breathless.

"The mischief! the dress deceived me dear young lady," continued the intruder, young, handsome, but palpably embarrassed, but Ora sprung to her feet with flashing eyes.

"How dare you!" she cried, and hurried away, the tears filling her eyes from sheer vexation. The young man attempted to overtake her, pleading, expostulating incoherently, but Ora fairly ran and gained her aunt's home overcome with the insolence of a perfect stranger.

She did not venture to the beach for two days after that. Then she went to the board walk, where she could seek protection, if again affronted, when a man in semi-uniform approached her.

"You will pardon me, miss," he said, "but you will have to accompany me to the police station. A lady just pointed you out as wearing some attire stolen from her trunk a week ago. The dress, particularly, which is precisely like the one she now wears, gives color to her claim."

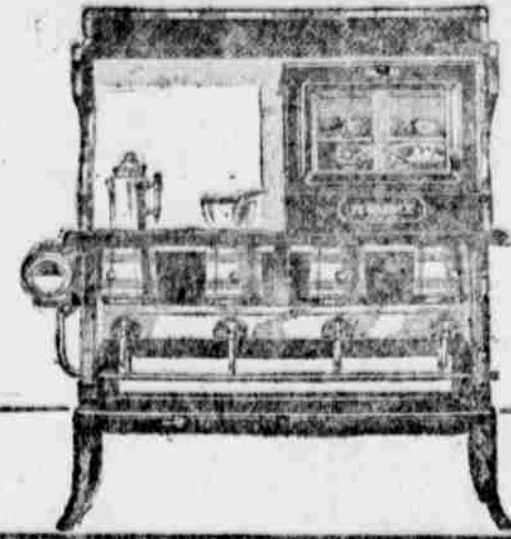
Ora stood aghast. She felt as if she would faint on the spot. Just then a handsome lady about her own size approached. "Officer," she said, "I positively identify those articles as those stolen from me," and was joined by a young man who looked at Ora and spoke suddenly.

"Sister, this is some great mistake! This is the young lady I told you about, whom I greeted as yourself. Look, she is terribly distressed. Officer, allow us to speak with the young lady apart," and he took the arm of the wavering and overcome Ora and led her to a bench.

It did not take long for light to shine on darkness. Ora told her simple, truthful story. Miss Edna Danvers was full of regret, and her brother wore the apologetic face of a man eager to atone for his especial error. They insisted on Ora coming to their hotel, and the full reparation of sincere regret and kindly interest told how they believed in their innocence.

"The first kiss I stole," observed Ronald Danvers, a week later to Ora. "The second one I ask you to award me because I love you," and Ora was willing.

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