

The Triflers

By FREDERICK ORIN BARTLETT

Author of "The Wall Street Girl"

Illustration by George E. Wolfe

ARRIVING in Paris on his usual schedule of travel and pleasure, Monte Covington, an American, for the first time in his ten years since college, realizes his thirty-two years. He is bored. One night he meets, coming from the opera alone, Marjory Stockton, whom he has long known, but whose time has been devoted to an elderly aunt. The aunt is dead, and Marjory, inheriting her fortune, is having her first taste of freedom. Its enjoyment is marred by offers of marriage, the most troublesome offender being Teddy Hamilton, whom she met on her last trip across. Monte, calling on her one morning, finds Marjory frightened at Teddy's threat to kill himself if she refuses him. Teddy arrives while they are talking, and is shown into the *pension* sitting-room downstairs. Monte wishes he were Marjory's brother, so he would have the right to settle Teddy. He suddenly thinks of a solution of the problem, and makes his suggestion to Marjory—to marry him for protection against unwelcome attention and to be his *camarade de voyage* simply. Marjory accepts the strange proposal. Monte then goes to Teddy and announces their engagement. The crazed boy whips out a revolver and shoots, wounding Monte's right shoulder. Marjory, as Monte's fiancée, decides it is her duty to nurse him, and, with her maid, takes up quarters in his hotel. Monte's splendid constitution pulls him through in a few weeks, and Marjory decides to leave Paris. But Monte, grown used to her attention and companionship, suggests their immediate marriage. While they are discussing this, Marjory is called to the telephone. It is Teddy Hamilton, who says he does not believe in her engagement. With her hand over the mouth-piece, she repeats this to Monte. Seeing her terror at Teddy's voice, Monte persuades her to marry him the next day, and himself announces the fact to Teddy.

MARJORY was to be married on June eighteenth, at eleven o'clock, in the chapel of the English Congregational Church. At ten o'clock of that day she was in her room before the mirror, trying to account for her heightened color. Marie had just left her in despair and bewilderment, after trying to make her look as bridelike as possible when she did not wish to look bridelike. Marie had wished to do her hair in some absurd new fashion.

"But, Marie," she had explained, "nothing is to be changed. Therefore why should I change my appearance?"

"Mademoiselle a bride—and nothing changed?" Marie had cried.

"Nothing about me; nothing about Mr. Covington. We are merely to be married, that is all—as a matter of convenience."

"Mademoiselle will see," Marie had answered cryptically.

"You will see yourself," Marjory had laughed.

Eh bien! something was changed already, as she had only to look in the mirror to observe. There was a deep flush upon her cheeks and her eyes did not look quite natural. She saw, and seeing only made it worse. Manifestly it was absurd of her to become excited now over a matter that up to this point she had been able to handle so reasonably. It was scarcely loyal to Monte. He had a right to expect her to be more sensible.

HE had put it well last night when he had remarked that for her to go to a chapel to be married was no more serious than to go to an embassy for a passport. She was merely to share with him the freedom that was his as a birthright of his sex. In no other respect whatever was she to be under any obligations to him. With ample means of her own, he was simply giving her an opportunity to enjoy them unmoled—a privilege which the world denied her as long as she remained unmarried.

Therefore it seemed scarcely decent for Marie to speak of her as a bride. Perhaps that accounted for the color. No sentiment was involved here. This was what made the arrangement possible. Sentiment involved caring; and, as Monte had

once said, "It's the caring that seems to make the trouble." That was the trouble with the Warrens. How Marie cared—from morning till night, with her whole heart and soul in a flutter—for Chic and the children. In a different way, Marjory supposed, Teddy cared. This was the one thing that made him so impossible. In another way, Peter Noyes cared.

She gave a quick start as she thought of Peter Noyes. She turned away from the mirror as if—as if ashamed. She sprang to her feet, with an odd, tense expression about her mouth. It was as if she were looking into his dark, earnest eyes. Peter had always been so intensely in earnest about everything. In college he had worked himself thin to lead his class. In the law school he had graduated among the first five, though he came out almost half blind. His record, however, had won for him a place with a leading law firm in New York. He had made love to her with his lips set as if love were some great responsibility. He had talked of duty and the joy of sacrifice until she had run away from him.

Not daring to look in the mirror again, she called Marie to adjust her hat and veil. "It is half past ten, Marie," she announced nervously. "I—I think Monsieur Covington must be waiting for us." "Yes, mam'selle."

Her ears caught at the word.

"Marie."

"Yes, mam'selle."

"I wish—even after this—to have you always address me as mademoiselle."

"But that—"

"It is my wish."

IT was a blue-and-gold morning, with the city looking as if it had received a scrubbing during the night. So too did Monte, who was waiting below for her. Clean-shaven and ruddy, in a dark gray morning coat and top hat, he looked very handsome, even with his crippled arm. And quite like a bridegroom! For a moment he made her wish she had taken Marie's advice about her hair. She was in a brown traveling suit with a piquant hat that made her look quite Parisienne—though her low tan shoes, tied with big silk bows at her trim ankles, were distinctly American.

Monte was smiling.

"You aren't afraid?" he asked.

"Of what, Monte?"

"I don't know. We're on our way."

She took a long look at his steady blue eyes. They braced her like wine.

"You must never let me be afraid," she answered.

"Then—*en avant!*" he called.

In a way, it was a pity that they could

not have been married out of doors. They should have gone into a garden for the ceremony instead of into the subdued light of the chapel. Then, too, it would have been much better had the Rev. Alexander Gordon been younger. He was a gentle, saintly-looking man of forty, but serious—terribly serious. He had lived long in Paris, but instead of learning to be gay he had become like those sad-faced priests at Notre Dame. Perhaps if he had understood better the present circumstances he would have entered into the occasion instead of remaining so very solemn.

As Marjory shook hands with him she lost her bright color. Then, too, he had a voice that made her think again of Peter Noyes. In sudden terror she clung to Monte's arm, and during the brief ceremony gave her responses in a whisper.

Peter Noyes himself could not have made of this journey to the chapel a more trying ordeal. A ring was slipped upon the third finger of her left hand. A short prayer followed, and an earnest "God bless you, my children," which left her feeling suffocated. She thought Monte would never finish talking with him—would never get out into the sunshine again. When he did, she shrank away from the glare of the living day.

Monte heard a sigh of relief.



"Marie thought her mistress looked as a bride should look. She saw monsieur's eyes warm as he slipped the wrap over madame's shoulders."