

Barbara Bain & Martin Landau

## Our landlord forced us to marry

By Polly Terry

He was adamant. "You can take it or leave it," the apartment owner said. "Pay rent from the first of the month or look for another place. Business is business."

The young couple before him looked at each other uncertainly. The girl was tall and lovely and poised, but for the moment her poise was broken. She had the look of a little girl who's been told that Santa Claus might not come after all. "Couldn't you just -?" she bravely started to ask.

But her young man stopped her. He fished into his pocket for his wallet and began counting out bills. "We'll take it," he said. "Here's your first month's rent. Now we are paid up completely through February."

The landlord wrote out a receipt. He wasn't particularly interested in his new tenants' personal problems and, of course, he never guessed that he was forcing the instant marriage of Barbara Bain and Martin Landau.

Barbara and Martin were planning to marry. But not so soon. And they both wanted a religious ceremony with family and friends there. Barbara wanted to wear a bridal gown and cut a wedding cake and indulge in all the sentimental traditions. But here they were confronted by their prospective landlord with an ultimatum; move in (or at least pay rent) by the first of the next month or forget all about the apartment they hoped to share in their new life.

At that time, both Barbara and Martin were struggling to gain footholds in the theater. They couldn't afford to pay rent for an apartment they weren't going to occupy, so, if they took the place, they'd have to move in. Instantly. That meant they'd have to rush to City Hall for a fast, civil ceremony without waiting

for the kind of traditional wedding they'd been planning.

"We got married in a civil service," Barbara laughs now, "for the silliest reason. An apartment. Unless you've lived in New York, you can't understand how hard apartments are to find. We found an apartment, but it was going to be available on the first of the month. Unless we took it then, we'd lose it. So we took it – and got married.

"But we didn't forget about the religious ceremony. We had that, too, ten days later."

Barbara said that the only ambition she harbored during girlhood was to be a wife. "All I wanted to do in high school," she said, "was to get married.

"When I married Martin, the circumstances may not have been ideal. He was still trying to establish himself as an actor, but I never doubted for a moment he'd succeed. People he'd worked with had already recognized his talent.

"Did I realize what I was getting into marrying an actor? Oh, certainly. I knew what I was getting into because of my own heart."

Barbara was born in Chicago and grew up in Illinois, graduating from the state university with a degree in sociology. In college, she'd given campus dramatics only a passing thought, because she believed she "wasn't good enough." She had no recognized desire to be an actress. Rather, she thought she'd become a teacher.

Armed with her sociology degree, she went to New York to become an educator. However, when a friend pointed out she was as well equipped for modeling as for teaching (maybe better) and that modeling paid better, she took the advice and became a model.

Thanks to her face, figure and intelligence – and it does take intelligence to become a top model – Barbara made such a splash in the high fashion field that she was featured regularly in such high fashion publications as *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*.

Even so, Barbara didn't get any real satisfaction from the field she'd entered. So, she studied dancing with Martha Graham, but still failed to find genuine fulfillment. Then one night after a modeling assignment, she looked in on Curt Conway's acting group and realized with surprise and joy that this was where she should be. Acting!

She began to attend Conway's class regularly and it was there, a couple of months later, that she met Martin Landau. Martin was New York born, a former newspaper cartoonist, who'd become committed to acting when he'd appeared in a college production of "Hamlet". He loved the stage, but common sense told him acting was a mighty shaky way to make a living. So, he'd gone to work as a cartoonist and had done well at it, until he quit to answer the compelling call and lure of the stage.

When he met Barbara, he was neither rich nor famous, but he was already respected by his colleagues as a young actor of remarkable promise.

"We met, and it was hate at first sight," his wife has recalled. She thought he was a pompous, stuffy, stuck-up young man who took himself entirely too seriously. He thought she was a silly, empty-headed blonde who should stick to modeling. A week later at a party, Barbara and Martin met again and this time they fell in love.

What happened?

"We talked," Barbara says. "You may find this hard to believe, but with Martin and me it was 'Kismet'."

They were fated. Through unbelievable good fortune they'd found each other, so, naturally, they decided to marry. They didn't make the decision right away, but only after each was truly and firmly convinced that their love was real and would be enduring.

Then they agreed they'd be married in a religious ceremony "just as soon as we find an apartment," they confidently assured each other.

But, their plans didn't work out quite as they'd expected. Barbara and Martin met on a rainy Thursday morning at City Hall for a brief ceremony, after which they kissed "goodbye" and went their separate ways: he to a rehearsal, she to her first drama class with Lee Strasberg. Even the witnesses had to rush away to other business.

That was on January 31, 1957. The rites were short and unromantic, but at least they permitted the Landaus to move into their hard-won, New York apartment as man and wife.

"I don't know whether my thinking was colored by utter foolishness," Barbara ponders now, "or by my utter faith in Martin. Anyway, I didn't worry at all about how we'd live or what our future together would be. I only knew it would be just wonderful."

On February 10, ten days after the civil ceremony, Mr. and Mrs. Landau were married again in the religious ceremony they'd both wanted from the first. Barbara was a beautiful bride in white veil and gown (which gave the elevator operator in their building a bit of a start when she and Martin left their apartment en route to the rites).

"It was lovely," Barbara says, "and I think maybe we enjoyed the formal wedding more, because we were already married. We weren't so nervous. At least, I know I wasn't."

"For a while we were poor – so poor that we lived on corn flakes and champagne. Someone had given us the champagne which was pretty nice. It added a little zip to the corn flakes. I can't remember that we worried, though."

"I remember later, when we were in Hollywood, Martin was offered a script which he hated, but was going to take it until I asked, 'Why are you going to do that when you hate it so?'"

"He said, 'Because it's work. Because we need money.'"

"I told him that I'd never wanted him to do something he didn't want to do just because it was a way of earning money. Money is important, but it's not the most important thing in the world. When he finally understood that I really meant what I said, he sent the script back. The question of whether he should do something he dislikes hasn't come up since."

The Landaus refuse to be separated by their careers and always have. On one occasion, Barbara turned down a contract with a motion picture studio because Martin's future seemed to lie in New York. She refused to hold him in Hollywood or to stay there without him.

"I'd give up my career opportunity to be with Martin," Barbara says, "but so far we've been very lucky. We've been able to be together without either of us making any great sacrifices within our careers." Unlike some Eastern actors and actresses who delight in knocking television, Barbara and Martin think they are in a great show that's part of a truly great medium.

"Working together in 'Mission: Impossible' is wonderful," she happily declares. "No, we don't get tired of working together. It's like – delicious."

After ten years of marriage and two daughters – Susan Meredith, seven and Juliet Rose, two – Mrs. Landau has arrived at two conclusions. The first is that marriage should be by

contract and that contracts should be negotiated. "With options," she adds.

"I think," Barbara says, "that a couple planning to marry should set forth in a contract just what is expected of each. They should set forth grounds for divorce and obligations to be met.

"I see women who are disappointed because their husbands haven't lived up to some dreams the women had. The husbands haven't done the things their wives expected of them when they married – but, then, the husbands never promised to do these things in the first place.

"If I were drawing up a contract, what would I require of my husband? That he laugh a lot."

With or without a contract, Barbara feels she's gotten all that she could possibly have bargained for. Because her second conclusion after ten years of marriage is this: marriage to Martin is wonderful. It's the kind of marriage that really deserves two ceremonies.