

By Sidney Smith

A BACHELOR HUSBAND

By RUBY M. AYRES

Author of "Richard Chatterton," Etc.
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THIS BEGINS THE STORY

Marie Chester had always adored Christopher Lane, and he had always loved her, principally because she had been raised with her. They had been together since they were children, and she had never known any other man. Christopher had loved her from the first, and she had loved him from the first. They were engaged to be married, and she was waiting for him to come home from his trip to Europe. She was waiting for him to come home from his trip to Europe. She was waiting for him to come home from his trip to Europe.

Madge that we're engaged?" he said. "Yes."

But even then she could not believe it. She dreaded lest with every moment she would wake and find it all a dream.

But it was still a reality when they got back home, and Aunt Madge pretended to be surprised, and cried and kissed them both, and she had never been so glad about anything.

She wanted them to have a glass of wine to celebrate the occasion, though, as a rule, she was a teetotaler, but Chris said no, he could not stay—he had an appointment. He went off in a great hurry, hardly saying good-night, and promising to be round early in the morning.

At the doorway he stopped and looked back at the two women.

"I'll—er—you must have a ring, Marie Celeste," he said. "I'll—er—I'll tell them to send some round," and he was gone.

It was a strange wailing altogether, but to Marie there was nothing amiss. She was in the seventh heaven of happiness. When she went to bed she looked out at the starry sky, and wished she were clever enough to write a poem about this most wonderful of nights.

She saw nothing wrong with the days that followed either. To be awkwardly kissed by Chris—even on the cheek—was a delicious happiness; to wear his ring, joy unspeakable; to be out and about with him, all that she asked of life.

The wedding was to be soon. There was nothing to wait for, so Chris and Aunt Madge agreed. They also agreed that it must be quiet, owing to their mourning. Marie Celeste agreed to everything—she was still living in the clouds. She could hardly come down to earth sufficiently to choose frocks and look at petticoats and silk stockings.

Aston Knight, a friend of Christopher's, was to be best man, and Marie's special school chum, Dorothy Webber, was to be maid of honor.

"I hope you won't mind such a quiet wedding, my dear child," Miss Chester said anxiously to Marie. "But if one starts to invite people, Chris has so many friends, and it will be difficult to know where to stop. So I thought if Mr. Knight and Dorothy came, and just your father's lawyer and myself—"

"I don't mind—arrange it as you like," Marie said. She would not have minded going off with Chris alone to church in his oldest frock if it had to come to that. There was not a cloud in her sky.

The wedding was fixed for a Friday. "Oh, not Friday?" Marie Chester murmured. "It's such an unlucky day! Surely Thursday will do just as well."

"I'm not superstitious," Chris answered. "Are you, Marie Celeste? I think Friday is a good day. We can get away then for the week-end."

Marie laughed. She thought Friday was the best day in all the week she said, of course, she was not superstitious.

But his Friday proved unkind, for, though it was the end of July, it rained hard when Marie woke in the morning and there was a chill wind blowing.

She sat up in bed and stared at the window, down which the raindrops were pouring, with incredulous eyes.

How could the weather possibly be so bad on such a day? It was the first faint shadow across her happiness.

The second came in the shape of a wire from Dorothy Webber, to say she could not possibly come after all. Her mother was ill, and she was wanted at home. Marie was bitterly disappointed, but she was young and in love; the world lay at her feet, and long before she was dressed to go to church her spirits had risen again and she was ready to laugh at Aunt Madge, who showed signs of tears.

"If you cry I shall take it as a bad omen," she told the old lady, kissing her. "What is there to cry for, when I am going to be so happy?"

Miss Chester put her arms round the girl and looked into her face with misty eyes.

"Darling—are you sure, quite sure, that you love Chris?"

"Do I love him? The brown eyes opened wide with amazement. "Why, I have always loved him," she said simply.

But she held Miss Chester's hand very tightly as they drove to church in the closed car, and for the first time her child's face was a little grave. Perhaps it was the dismal day that oppressed her, or perhaps at last she was beginning to realize that she was taking a serious step by her marriage with Chris.

"It's for all your life, remember," a little warning voice seemed to whisper, and she raised her head proudly as her heart made answer: "I know—and there could be no greater happiness."

It was raining still when they reached the church, and the chauffeur held an umbrella over Marie as she stepped from the car into the porch. She wore a little traveling frock of palest gray, and little gray shoes and stockings, and a wide-brimmed hat with a sweeping feather.

Though she had never felt more grown-up in her life, she had never looked such a child, and for a moment a queer pang touched the heart of young Lawless as he turned at the chancel steps and looked at her as she came up the aisle with Miss Chester.

But Marie's face was quite happy beneath the wide-brimmed hat, and her brown eyes met his with such complete love and trust that for a moment he wavered, and the color rushed to his cheeks.

But the parson was already there, and the service had begun, and in less than ten minutes little Marie Celeste was the wife of the man she had adored all her life, and was signing her maiden name for the last time with a trembling hand.

And then they were driving away together in the car, to which Aston Knight, with a sentimental remembrance of other weddings, had tied an old shoe, and it hopped and dangled dejectedly in the mud and rain behind as the car sped homeward.

And Christopher looked at his wife and said:

"Well, we couldn't have a worse day, could we?"

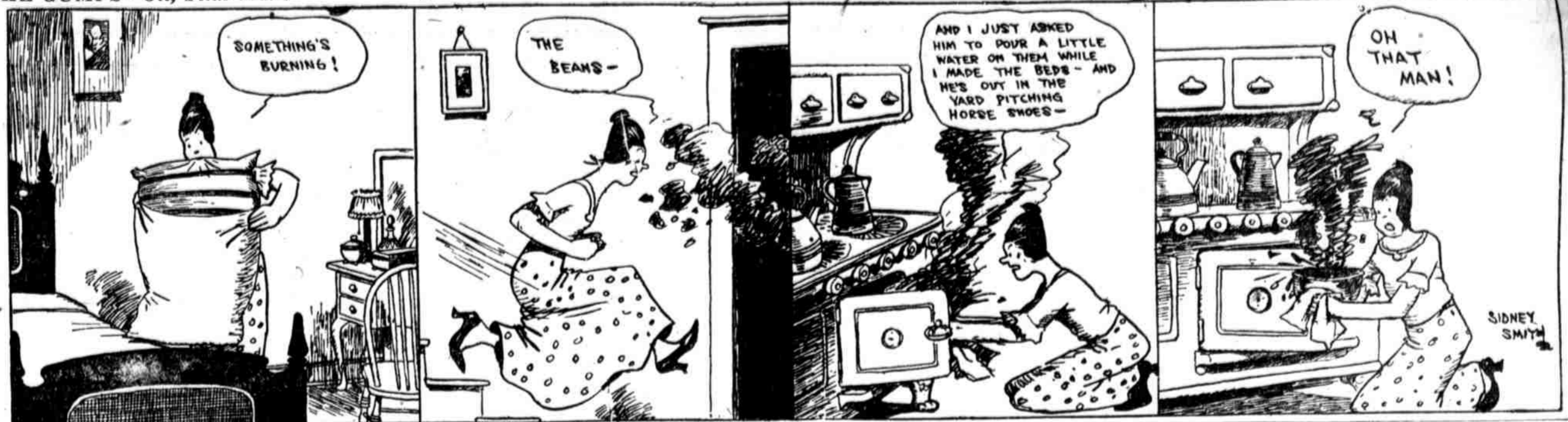
Marie smiled. "What does it matter about the weather?"

Christopher thought it mattered the deuce of a lot, but then he was a man, and a man—even a bridegroom—never sees things through the same rose-colored glasses as a woman.

It was such a little way from the church to the house that there was no time to say much more, and then they were home, and Miss Chester, who had followed hard on their heels in another car, was crying over Marie and kissing her again, and Marie woke to the fact that she was really a married woman!

There was a sumptuous lunch, to which nobody but Aston Knight and the lawyer did justice, and then Marie went upstairs and changed her frock, because it was still pouring with rain, and wrapped her small self into a warm coat, and there were many kisses and good-bys, and at last it was all over and she and Chris were speeding away together.

THE GUMPS—Oh, That Man!



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—The Boss Is Never Appreciative



The Young Lady Across the Way



THE LITTLE SCORPIONS' CLUB



SCHOOL DAYS



PETEY—Next Case



GASOLINE ALLEY—A Sliding Scale



CONTINUED TOMORROW